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## CAREER



# Career

*A New Play*

*by*

James Lee



RANDOM HOUSE  
NEW YORK

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To Neva



*CAREER was first presented by Nina Vance at the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas, on August 28, 1956, and was subsequently presented by James Preston and Charles Olsen at Seventh Avenue South, New York City, on April 30, 1957, with the following cast:*

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

CHARLEY MARSALLA	Charles White
SAM LAWSON	Charles Aidman
BARBARA NEILSON	Nancy Rennick
ROBERT KENSINGTON	Clifton James
ASSISTANT	Forrest Wood
OLD ACTOR	Richard Goldhurst
MAURY NOVAK	Norman Rose
SHIRLEY DRAKE	Mary James
ERIC PETERS	William Long, Jr.
SHARON KENSINGTON	Norma Crane
PINKIE BONAPARTE	Bernard Reed
JACK GOLDMAN	Dick Stahl
A SOLDIER	Larry Hagman
MATT HEMSLEY	Forrest Wood

*Directed by Charles Olsen*

*Designed by David Hays*



Most of the play is set in various places in New York City.

The action begins in 1956, then goes back to 1931 and continues to 1956 again.

There are three acts.



## **ACT ONE**



## ACT ONE

*As the curtain rises, the lights come up on one area of the stage, leaving the rest of the stage darkened. We see the interior of O'Brien's Restaurant. It is one of those expensive places that cater to rich actors, baseball players, politicians and ticket scalpers. It tries—and very successfully, too—to maintain the atmosphere of the old-time saloon.*

*It is 1956. CHARLEY MARSALLA, a waiter, is setting out service plates. CHARLEY is in his early fifties. Years of being on his feet have taught him to respect their limitations and to step carefully, almost lovingly, when he walks.*

*We hear music coming from a small radio. The music fades and the announcer is heard.*

### ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Hi there and howdy do ya! The next fifteen minutes of *Memory Melody* is being brought to you by the Forty Plus Club. Attention, men over forty! The Forty Plus Club offers attractive positions to men over forty with executive backgrounds. You needn't be put on that shelf today! Let those years of high-level thinking go to work for you. Visit our attractive offices at 106 East Thirty-eighth Street, Manhattan. (*SAM LAWSON enters and listens to the radio for a moment. He is forty-six years old, and might best be described as an average man, of medium height, with some gray hairs showing through the brown. He is in good physical condition. He is now wearing a business suit, but puts*

## C A R E E R

*on a waiter's jacket as the scene continues)* If you're over forty, you'll bring a mature point of view to policy making, effort co-ordination, business and industry energy correlation. If you're over forty, you're the man we want to see. And if you're over forty, you'll remember this one.

*(Music resumes and continues softly.)*

SAM

Hello, Charley.

CHARLEY

Oh, hi, Sam. That was quick.

SAM

I didn't go to the cemetery.

CHARLEY

Oh.

SAM

Thanks for lending me a hand.

CHARLEY

That friend of yours was around again.

SAM

He's no friend.

CHARLEY

I told him where you were. (*Hesitates*) How was it?

## C A R E E R

SAM

Very nice. The minister knew Mr. McDonald and he gave a very nice sermon.

CHARLEY

I suppose I should've gone, but I can't take funerals. I think Mr. McDonald would understand. I hope so, anyway. He was a fine man. The best headwaiter I ever worked with. And fair. You can't say that about a lot of them.

SAM

That's right.

CHARLEY

We're gonna miss him. O'Brien's won't be the same.

SAM

Miss O'Brien'll find somebody for the job. Maybe you, Charley.

CHARLEY

Not me. Never. I'd be afraid of my English all the time. You know who I think she'd like, Sam?

SAM

Who?

CHARLEY

You.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Me?

CHARLEY

That's the truth. And it's a good job, Sam. McDonald used to make up to two hundred dollars a week some weeks. I know that for a fact.

SAM

I don't have any experience as a headwaiter.

CHARLEY

You could pick it up quick. You probably picked it up just from bein' here, if you only knew it. How long you been workin' here, Sam?

SAM

(*Thinks a moment*)

This is fifty-six. From fifty— Five or six years, off and on.

CHARLEY

I think that's the only thing that would stop her, Sam. The off and on. O'Brien's is important to her. Her old man left it to her and it's her whole life. She's serious about it and she likes other people to be serious about it.

SAM

I do my job.

## C A R E E R

### CHARLEY

And good. I'm not sayin' that. But since you been here you've quit two or three times for jobs in shows that never lasted very long.

### SAM

One of those shows lasted six months.

### CHARLEY

She couldn't let you do that if you were headwaiter, Sam. The job's too important. You couldn't just quit and come back any time you wanted to.

### SAM

(*Hesitant*)

I don't know, Charley.

### CHARLEY

I do. I know how you feel. But let me tell you something. I been a waiter practically all my life. And I'm very happy bein' a waiter. But I wasn't always. It wasn't the work. Oh, you're on your feet all the time, but the hours aren't bad. And the money's nothing to sneeze at—especially in a high-class place like O'Brien's. The thing that made me unhappy was the thought that maybe I should be doin' something else. Goin' to night school, or savin' up to buy a business of my own, or something. I didn't know what. Something! I got to where I was makin' myself miserable. I was! Then one day I was workin' and suddenly I stopped. Right there it hit me, and I said to myself, "Charley, let's face it. You're a waiter and why worry you

## C A R E E R

should be anything else." And so I stopped. Right there. And I been very happy ever since. (*SAM is silent*) How old are you, Sam?

**SAM**

Forty-six.

**CHARLEY**

Two hundred dollars, Sam. Some weeks. Think it over.

**SAM**

You talk good sense, Charley.

**CHARLEY**

(*Inspecting the table*)

Napkins! The bus boys we got here think about everything but their jobs!

(*CHARLEY exits. SAM starts to arrange the service plates more neatly, and then stops. He stands motionless for a moment.*)

**SAM**

(*Thoughtfully*)

Two hundred dollars. Two hundred dollars.

(*The lights fade.*)

**GIRL'S VOICE**

Two hundred dollars!

(*The lights come up on another area of the stage. We have gone back to the past—to the summer of 1931. BARBARA NEILSON sits on a mailbox bench. She is in her late*

## CAREER

*(teens. In her hands she holds two hundred dollars in bills.  
She is dressed in the style of the period.)*

BARBARA

Two hundred dollars! And you earned every penny of it!

SAM

*(Moves into the lighted area. His manner is that of an energetic,  
enthusiastic young man in his late teens)*

Uh-huh. That money represents over a million cubic feet of  
shoveled snow.

BARBARA

*(Rises)*

Oh, Sam, I'm so proud of you! *(She kisses him and then  
forces the money on him)* Here. Pin it in your wallet and staple  
that to your pocket.

SAM

And lock myself in a closet.

BARBARA

I'm serious. You know what that money means? A career!  
The first year's tuition in law school bought and paid for!

SAM

Barbara—

BARBARA

Oh, I know it's not till fall and I don't mean to live in the  
future—but a person has to plan *some*. I mean, look how fast  
these first two years have gone.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Yes, that's so.

BARBARA

(*Happily*)

Just blink and graduation will be here. (SAM laughs) Blink again and you'll be taking the bar exam.

SAM

(*Sardonically*)

Yeah, enough blinks and they're lowering your casket.

BARBARA

Sam, you're morbid! (*Catches his hand to pull him with her*) Come on in the house. I want to tell Mother and Daddy.

SAM

Not just yet.

BARBARA

Please. They'll be so impressed. You—practically a lawyer!

SAM

(*Plunging in*)

Barbara, I'm not going to law school.

BARBARA

A lawyer is so dignified. (SAM shakes his head) Oh, let me brag. I'm so proud. Please, Sam!

## C A R E E R

SAM

I'm not going to law school. Ever. (*BARBARA suddenly hears him clearly*) I'm not going to be a lawyer.

BARBARA

Not going to—(*SAM shakes his head*) But why?

SAM

(*Sits on bench*)

Because when it comes time for them to lower my casket, I don't want to have spent my life doing something I didn't like. You don't think that's wrong, do you?

BARBARA

(*Fuzzy*)

Oh, no—no, of course not, everyone should do what they like. But why aren't you going to be a lawyer?

SAM

I want to do something I love.

BARBARA

What, for heaven's sake?

SAM

(*Hesitates*)

I want to—Barbara, I'm going to be an actor.

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

(*Stunned*)

An actor? (*sam nods. She kneels on grass*) But you can still do that and be a lawyer. I mean, you can be in the shows at the Players and with the Masque Club. Just like you've always been. (*sam slowly shakes his head*) You mean, you're going to be an actor—as a profession? (*sam nods. Pause*) All right, Sam. (*Rises*) I guess there have to be people to be actors. (*sam laughs*) You can take some drama courses in the grad school. History of the theatre, and all that. They're very good courses and you can get a master's.

SAM

Barbara, I'm not going to grad school. (*He rises. BARBARA sits, wide-eyed*) I'm going to New York.

BARBARA

New York?

SAM

That's where I have to go if I'm going to be an actor.

BARBARA

(*Tightly*)

When?

SAM

Next week. Right after graduation.

BARBARA

(*Aghast*)

Oh, Sam!

## CAREER

SAM

Why wait?

BARBARA

Well, I hope you have a very successful career. I'm going in.  
Good night.

(She rises to go.)

SAM

Barbara, I thought you understood.

BARBARA

(Stops and turns back to face him. Angry)

I understand that, as close as we've been, your whole life is going to be changed and you've never seen fit to say one word to me about it. You never even hinted!

SAM

(Miserable)

I know, I know. I kept putting it off.

BARBARA

That wasn't fair!

SAM

I thought that maybe you wouldn't like the idea of marrying an actor.

BARBARA

Marrying? But you never said one word about marrying me!  
Never.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Well, I thought that just the way I avoided it made it pretty obvious that there was something I was avoiding. And that was it.

BARBARA

Oh, Sam, *are* you asking me?

SAM

More than anything. Yes, I am asking you.

BARBARA

Oh, Sam. I love you!

(*She throws her arms around him. They kiss.*)

SAM

Will you, Barbara? Will you marry an actor?

BARBARA

I wouldn't marry anybody else! (*They embrace*) But next week is so soon. A girl can't do things in such a hurry.

SAM

You can't come with me, Barbara.

BARBARA

(*Sits on bench*)

Oh, Lord! What'll I tell Mother and Daddy. They've always kind of planned on a big wedding for me—Mother had, anyway. (*Smiles*) To tell the truth, so had I. (*Laughs*) They might think we *had* to get married!

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Kneels on grass. Seriously*)

That's not so!

BARBARA

Don't worry, honey. I'll tell you what I'll tell them. I'll tell them that if they don't object to the short notice they can come and use our swimming pool in Hollywood any time they want!

SAM

Barbara, I can't ask you to marry me now. It's gonna take a while for me to get really established. A couple of years, maybe. You've got to be realistic about that, Barbara.

BARBARA

(*Joins him on grass*)

And *you* be realistic. If you're a successful actor you make a lot of money. Right?

SAM

All right. I'll grant you that.

BARBARA

Then you'll be able to afford that swimming pool!

SAM

(*Laughs*)

I tell you we won't be in Hollywood. I don't look like Richard Barthelmess.

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

(*Enraptured*)

Then we'll have a penthouse in New York!

SAM

It's possible.

BARBARA

It's highly probable! And I'll tell you something else. It'll have a swimming pool!

SAM

(*Laughing*)

In a penthouse?

BARBARA

In a penthouse. Oh, Sam, Sam, was anybody ever so happy in the history of the world!

(*They kiss, as the lights fade and then come up again on another area of the stage. It is now November of 1933. A middle-aged man stands in front of a railing that separates an inner office from an outer one. The man is ROBERT KENSINGTON, a producer. He is heavy-set and carries a big cigar. His arm is crooked and the cigar is at shoulder level. This is a characteristic pose of his. An ASSISTANT is with him. Lined up, and approaching the ASSISTANT one by one, are actors—men and women, young and old. He shakes hands with each.*)

ASSISTANT

(*Leading an actor forward*)

Right this way, please. This is Mr. Kensington.

C A R E E R

KENSINGTON

(*Shaking hands*)

How do you do. I'm sorry. There's nothing in the play for you.

(*The actor moves off and the next one takes his place.*)

ASSISTANT

Mr. Kensington.

KENSINGTON

(*Shaking hands*)

I'm sorry. You're not the type.

(*The actor moves off and the next in line comes forward.*)

ASSISTANT

This is Mr. Kensington.

OLD ACTOR

I have some of my notices, Mr. Kensington. If you could just spare a minute.

KENSINGTON

I'm just looking for types today.

(SAM LAWSON and MAURY NOVAK move up into the lighted area and are now standing in line, just a few people behind the OLD ACTOR.)

OLD ACTOR

(*Pleading*)

It'll just take a minute.

(*He starts to take notices and clippings from his pocket.*)

C A R E E R

K E N S I N G T O N

Sorry.

S A M

This is awful.

M A U R Y

Don't beg him, Sam. Whatever you do, don't beg him.

(*The old actor is trying to force the clippings under KENSINGTON's nose.*)

A S S I S T A N T

(*Taking OLD ACTOR's arm*)

Next please.

(*The old actor slumps and turns away. The next in line is about to speak but is interrupted.*)

K E N S I N G T O N

Nothing for you at all. (*The actor moves off, and the next actor moves up*) Thank you.

(*The actor moves off. SAM now moves up to KENSINGTON.*)

S A M

How do you do, Mr. Kensington. (*KENSINGTON shakes hands with him and looks at him very intently. Finally SAM breaks the tension*) I'd like to read for the play, Mr. Kensington.

K E N S I N G T O N

(*Ignores SAM and turns to the ASSISTANT*)

Donald. The son.

C A R E E R

A S S I S T A N T

Yes, Mr. Kensington. He does look the part.

S A M

I'd love to read for it, Mr. Kensington.

K E N S I N G T O N

(Examining him)

Yep, that's what Donald should look like.

S A M

That's wonderful!

K E N S I N G T O N

(Looks at him for another long moment, then shakes his head)

Afraid not, though. I never saw you do anything.

S A M

But if I look right . . . If you'll give me a chance to show  
you—

K E N S I N G T O N

Readings don't mean a thing. I've been taken too many times.  
Sorry.

A S S I S T A N T

Next, please.

S A M

Look, Mr. Kensington, if you want to see me on stage you've  
got an opportunity right now.

C A R E E R

KENSINGTON

I've seen everything that's running now. I don't remember you from anything.

SAM

I'm playing the lead in *The Glass House*.

KENSINGTON

That's not on Broadway.

SAM

The Actors' Rostrum production.

KENSINGTON

What's that?

SAM

We're in the old Seaman's Tabernacle on Houston Street. Performances every night but Monday. I can leave tickets for you at the box office any night you—

KENSINGTON

(Laughs)

Take it easy, son. I can't trek all the way down to Houston Street.

SAM

It's not hard to get to. The subway—or a cab can—

KENSINGTON

Tell you the truth, I go that far downtown and I get the bends!

## CAREER

(*The ASSISTANT laughs appreciatively at his boss's joke. The actors behind SAM and MAURY, who have been listening, go into gales of laughter at the Great Man's sense of humor.*)

MAURY

(*Angry*)

It's your duty to see him, Mr. Kensington. He gives a great performance.

KENSINGTON

(*To SAM*)

Who's this? Your agent?

(*The ASSISTANT and the actors again laugh heartily.*)

SAM

This is Maury Novak. He directed the show.

KENSINGTON

Well, I want to wish you both all the luck in the world.

ASSISTANT

Move along, please.

SAM

Mr. Kensington, please—

MAURY

Don't beg him, Sam!

C A R E E R

A S S I S T A N T

Next, please.

(SAM moves to KENSINGTON's right as SHIRLEY DRAKE, an agent, walks into the lighted area. She is with a young man who can only be described as a "collar ad." His name is ERIC PETERS.)

SHIRLEY

Oh, Bob. I didn't know you were seeing a lot of people today.

KENSINGTON

Open call, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

This is Eric Peters. I called you about him.

KENSINGTON

Oh, yes. How are you, Peters?

(They shake hands.)

PETERS

Hello, Mr. Kensington.

SHIRLEY

I was under the impression we had an appointment.

SAM

(Angry)

So was I, lady. A real appointment. (To KENSINGTON) Your secretary told me ten o'clock. And then I stand here in line all the way back to Eighth Avenue!

C A R E E R

MAURY

Take it easy, Sam.

KENSINGTON

Shirley, why don't you and Mr. Peters step into my office.

SHIRLEY

(*Hesitates a second, then turns to PETERS*)

Come on, Eric.

(*They exit.*)

KENSINGTON

(*To SAM*)

Look, son, would you rather I didn't hold open calls? You actors are always complaining about no open casting calls.

SAM

I don't care what you do as long as you come to see our show.

KENSINGTON

Well—

SAM

Promise me!

ASSISTANT

Next!

KENSINGTON

I'll try.

## CAREER

SAM

(*Clasping KENSINGTON's hand*)

Thanks, Mr. Kensington. You'll never regret it. *The Glass House.* The Actors' Rostrum. Seaman's Tabernacle. Houston Street.

KENSINGTON

Yes, yes. Now will you allow me to get on with this?

SAM

Sure.

(SAM moves to the periphery of the lighted area and waits there for MAURY.)

KENSINGTON

(To MAURY)

Ah, yes, the director. I'm sorry but you're—

MAURY

Not the type.

KENSINGTON

Sorry. (To ASSISTANT) Let's break for lunch.

ASSISTANT

Yes sir—(At door) Back at one!

(MAURY shrugs and moves ahead to join SAM. The lights fade out on KENSINGTON and the actors, and MAURY and SAM are alone.)

C A R E E R

MAURY

You never let him up, did you?

SAM

Do you think he'll come?

MAURY

(*Looks at SAM and smiles*)

Come outta dreamland, kid. This is nineteen thirty-three.

SAM

What does that mean?

MAURY

(*Frowns*)

How long you been in New York, Sam? A year? A year and a half?

SAM

Two years and a half.

MAURY

Did you ever meet a producer and have anything *different* happen from what happened this afternoon?

SAM

What'll I tell Barbara? She had her hopes up.

MAURY

Why? Why should she?

## C A R E E R

SAM

Because *I* did.

MAURY

That was wrong.

SAM

Why was it? I was doing what I could. You do what you can and you've got a right to figure maybe something can happen from it. That's not wrong. (*Shakes his head in dismay*) Anyway, tonight, when you come over—explain to Barbara what a squirrel cage it was. For everybody.

MAURY

I was thinking—maybe I shouldn't come over tonight.

SAM

But we planned. And Monday's the only good time. No performance at the Actors' Rostrum. Why don't you want to come?

MAURY

Well, to be honest, I don't think Barbara appreciates my type.

SAM

Sure she does!

MAURY

No. I know, Sam. And I know she won't like the broad.

SAM

Well, is she—nice?

C A R E E R

MAURY

In the hay.

SAM

What's her name?

MAURY

Sharon Kensington.

SAM

*His daughter?*

MAURY

(*Smiles*)

I'm giving her private lessons.

SAM

Maury, this is great. Get her to drag him down to Houston Street.

MAURY

She hates him.

SAM

But if we could just get him there. You've got to try, Maury.

MAURY

(*Shrugs*)

I'll try.

SAM

And you've got to bring her to the apartment. What's her name?

C A R E E R

MAURY

Sharon.

SAM

You let me talk to her and I'll get Kensington to a performance!

MAURY

(*Laughs*)

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold."

SAM

I want that part, Maury. And tonight's my chance to get it.

MAURY

(*Looks at him for a long moment*)

Okay.

SAM

Thanks, Maury.

(As the lights fade, the rumble of an El train can be heard in the distance, becoming increasingly louder. The lights come up again on another section of the stage, showing a cold-water flat. The El structure and part of the street can be seen through the window. The room is obviously shabby: the paint on the walls is dirty and peeling, the furniture—a table, two chairs, a bed and a screen—is quite dilapidated. A girl is lying on the bed and has covered her head with a pillow against the roar of the approaching train. After the train has passed the window and the sound fades, the girl removes the pillow. We now see that

## CAREER

*it is BARBARA. She turns and tries to put her arm around the nonexistent person next to her in the bed. She suddenly becomes aware that there is no one there. She sits up, frightened. We hear the sound of a door being shut.)*

BARBARA

Sam, is that you?

SAM

(Off)

Yeah.

BARBARA

(Looks at alarm clock next to bed)

Good gravy! Eight-thirty! I'll be late for work.

SAM

(Enters, carrying a grocery bag. He kisses her. Laughs)

It's not morning, honey. It's eight-thirty P.M.

BARBARA

Oh, thank God! (Stretches, then stops) Why aren't you at the theatre?

SAM

It's Monday, the night off.

BARBARA

(Shaking her head)

It's all coming back. I lay down to take a nap. (Puts her arms around his neck and kisses him) It's true about beauty sleep. You're much more beautiful than the last time I saw you.

## CAREER

SAM

(Laughs, moves to table and takes a container of milk from grocery bag)

I'm not really what you call beautiful. Examine my features individually and they're not good. But all together—(Blows a kiss) I'm damned attractive.

BARBARA

(Happily)

You're certainly in a good mood.

(She rises.)

SAM

I've got great news, marvelous news.

BARBARA

I'll get you a glass for that milk. (Goes to a cabinet for a glass and also picks up a wrapped sandwich, which has been lying there. Then, eagerly) What's the news?

SAM

You know Robert Kensington, the producer?

BARBARA

I've heard you talk about him.

SAM

Maury Novak knows his daughter. We're going to get her to get Kensington to come down to an Actors' Rostrum performance.

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

(*Slightly disappointed*)

I thought maybe the news was more—tangible. (*Unwraps sandwich*) I saved your sandwich.

(*She hands it to him.*)

SAM

(*Offering sandwich*)

Aren't you going to have any?

BARBARA

I ate by myself earlier.

SAM

I'm sorry. (*Takes a drink of milk*) The darned newspapers get thicker every day. I spent so much time at Kensington's and making the rounds I didn't get a full quota until after eight o'clock.

BARBARA

(*Going to the bed and straightening it*)

Poor baby, what a boring job. Interviewing people about what page of the newspaper they read. You know, Sam, maybe you ought to get a job in a restaurant—as a waiter, maybe.

SAM

A waiter! I couldn't work at the Actors' Rostrum.

BARBARA

(*Sighs*)

At least waiters always eat.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Maybe the Sunshine Sandwich Shops need another spy.

BARBARA

(*Putting pillow cover on pillow*)

Don't look down on my job. I don't. I just thank God there's a little imperfection in the world. If the waitresses didn't short-change people once in a while and the chefs didn't try and sneak a drink on the job occasionally, there'd be no reason for the Sunshine Sandwich Shops to hire people to report them for it. And we wouldn't even eat as good as we do.

SAM

(*Crosses to her*)

When I get my break you can walk into any Sunshine Sandwich Shop in New York City with a cap that says "Spy" on it, for all I care.

BARBARA

Sam, I've got good news.

SAM

What?

BARBARA

(*Hesitates a moment, then goes quickly to the screen beside the bed*)

I'll show you.

SAM

(*Laughs*)

Building the suspense, eh?

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

(*From behind the screen*)

Guess who's in town?

SAM

(*Crossing to the cabinet to put away the milk and the glass*)  
Marjorie and Allan Burke.

BARBARA

How did you guess?

SAM

They're the only people we know from Lansing who *ever* come to town.

BARBARA

Some sort of annual—

SAM

—Annual wholesalers' convention.

BARBARA

They want to take us to Peacock Alley. You could wear your blue suit. Allan'll probably wear a tux, you know what a peacock he is himself.

SAM

Oh, swell. Maybe he'll get a few drinks in him like he did the last time and lean over to me some time in the evening and impose on our friendship with, "How've you really been doing, boy?"

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

He's showing off. Everyone shows off once in a while. It doesn't mean they're bad.

SAM

Have we got a corkscrew?

BARBARA

On the top shelf of the cabinet. (*sam takes a bottle of wine from the paper bag and starts toward the table*) I brushed your blue suit.

SAM

Thanks.

(*He takes a corkscrew from the top shelf of the cabinet and starts to open the wine bottle.*)

BARBARA

What do you want a corkscrew for?

SAM

For the cork in the wine bottle.

BARBARA

Wine? What are you talking about?

(*She comes from behind the screen. She has put on her white formal. She is lovely. SAM stops and looks at her for a long moment.*)

SAM

Oh, Barbara, you're so beautiful.

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

(*Smiles*)

Thank you. (*They kiss*) I haven't worn this dress since the last time Marjorie and Allan were in town.

SAM

You mean—you planned to see them tonight?

BARBARA

(*Nods happily*)

Umhmmmmmmmm. I told them we'd meet them at eleven at the Waldorf if we could make it. They're going to dinner before with some friends of Marjorie's parents.

SAM

(*Shakes his head slowly*)

We can't make it. (*BARBARA merely looks at him*) I told you Maury Novak and—

BARBARA

But this is a real date!

SAM

So is Maury.

BARBARA

I can't put on my white formal to sit around here with some unwashed actor—

## C A R E E R

SAM

Barbara, don't you see what's important? Maury isn't just an actor, he's a director. And he gave me this part. And Sharon Kensington—

BARBARA

But on our anniversary?

SAM

Our anniversary?

BARBARA

(*Turns away*)

Two and a half years.

SAM

(*Quietly*)

Two and a half years.

BARBARA

Of course it's not a real anniversary, but we've been out so seldom—not since the last time Marjorie and Allan were here.

SAM

We can't, Barbara. Maury—

BARBARA

(*Turns to face him*)

Maury! What about Allan Burke? He was your best friend in Lansing.

SAM

We're not in Lansing now!

## C A R E E R

**BARBARA**

Well, if friendship doesn't mean anything to you, Sam Lawson, does it mean anything to you that I'd like to have a little fun for a change?

**SAM**

(*Sits*)

Fun? Do you think it's fun for me to see Allan Burke throw away on one evening as much as it costs us to live for two weeks?

**BARBARA**

He's able to!

**SAM**

Do you think it's fun for me to see he's able to?

**BARBARA**

Don't be envious, Sam. You're never envious. Don't be now.

**SAM**

Last time he was here he offered me a job if we'd come back to Lansing. This time he'll try and slip me some money under the table.

**BARBARA**

Then you should take it! (*Quickly*) I didn't mean that. I just mean money is money.

**SAM**

You think it's fun to see Marjorie dressed up to the ears and you in the same thing—that white formal—you wore when they were here last time?

C A R E E R

BARBARA

That's my lookout.

SAM

It's my lookout, too. I'm your husband.

BARBARA

Then do something about it.

(They glare at each other. Suddenly we hear a loud rapping on the door.)

MAURY

(Off)

Sam! Sam Lawson!

SAM

(To BARBARA)

They're here. Maury and the girl. Please let's not fight, Barbara.

SHARON

(Off)

Hey, let us in. We want to fight too!

MAURY

(Off)

Shut up!

SAM

(To BARBARA)

Let's just try and have a good time.

(BARBARA looks at him for a moment, then turns and goes behind the screen.)

## CAREER

MAURY

(*Off*)

Sam!!

(SAM goes quickly to the door and opens it. MAURY stands there with SHARON KENSINGTON. She is wrapped in a long white fox fur piece. SHARON is a striking young woman with a perpetually manic personality. She has had quite a lot to drink and is trying valiantly to do as she has been told and behave herself.)

SAM

Hello.

MAURY

(*As they enter*)

Hello, Sam. Sam, this is Sharon Kensington. (SHARON kisses SAM on the mouth) Sharon!

SHARON

Well, you said he was your friend.

(SAM is a bit taken aback. She smiles enigmatically and moves down into the room, examining the apartment.)

MAURY

Sorry if we're late, but I didn't know there were so many bars between Sharon's place and here.

SAM

That's okay. (*Turns to SHARON*) May I take your—  
(He indicates her fur piece.)

## C A R E E R

SHARON

(*Shakes her head*)

No, no, no. I might catch cold. (*Glares at MAURY*) I'm forbidden to have a drink.

MAURY

Now, Sharon—

SHARON

It's part of my instructions for the evening. I can do anything except be myself.

MAURY

(*Moves down to her*)

That'll be enough. Now, sit down and be nice.

SHARON

(*Suddenly like a little girl*)

Only if I get a kiss!

(*She goes to MAURY for her kiss as BARBARA comes from behind the screen. MAURY stops.*)

MAURY

Oh, good evening, Barbara.

(*SHARON's back is to BARBARA as she drops her fur piece on the bed.*)

BARBARA

Hello.

SAM

Oh, excuse me, Sharon. This is my wife, Barbara.

C A R E E R

SHARON

(*Turns to BARBARA. Looks at her dress*)  
My God, don't tell me this is your wedding day!

SAM

No—er—Barbara thought—that is—(*MAURY sighs in defeat*)  
Would you like some wine?  
(*He begins to pour.*)

SHARON

(*Sits on bed*)

Wine! Oh, how sweet!

MAURY

(*Sits on a chair near the table. Resolute*)

No.

SHARON

Wine, honey! That's not a *drink*! This is very hospitable of  
you, Saul.

SAM

Sam.

SHARON

Sam! Oh, I love that name! I lost it to a boy named Sam. He's  
a pansy now.

MAURY

Sharon, shut up!

## CAREER

SHARON

Do you want me to lie, for God's sake? I'm just telling the truth. He is a pansy! (SAM looks at BARBARA. She is silent with embarrassment. MAURY shakes his head grimly. SAM hands SHARON the wine glass. She smiles and resumes her best party manners) Thank you.

(BARBARA sits on the bed. SAM extends a glass to her but she shakes her head.)

SAM

(Toasting)

Here's to—all of us.

SHARON

(Sipping)

How quaint!

SAM

Let's hope everything good happens to us.

SHARON

You're nice. I could tell you were nice when I kissed you. That's still the only foolproof way of judging character. (MAURY laughs) Oh, he's not mad at me any more!

(She crosses to MAURY.)

MAURY

What good does it do?

SHARON

Oh, I'm so glad we came! You're getting him over his grouch.

## C A R E E R

S A M

Well, we're glad you're here, Sharon. (*Glances at BARBARA and attempts to include her*) I was telling Barbara about your father. About being a producer. And about his new play.

S H A R O N

Yes, it looks like he's got another hit. The son of a bitch! I sneaked into his office and read it when I was picking up my allowance. This one's got everything.

M A U R Y

Probably make eight million dollars and keep everyone's mind off the Depression.

S H A R O N

(*Sits on MAURY's lap*)

Isn't he cute? He has only one flaw. He won't drink. I'm very suspicious of anyone who won't drink. Aren't you? It's as though they were afraid of what might come out.

B A R B A R A

I believe you're right. (*To SAM*) I'd like a glass of that wine, Sam.

(*SAM pours some wine and hands it to her.*)

S H A R O N

(*While BARBARA has been speaking*)

Won't you take one little sip? (*MAURY shakes his head*) All right, don't try to improve.

## CAREER

SAM

Here's to your father's play, Sharon.

SHARON

How sweet!

SAM

You know, I saw him about the play. He said I was the right type—

SHARON

Oh, you are. For the son.

SAM

We were thinking, if you could get him down to the Actors' Rostrum some night next week—

SHARON

You see, getting my father out of midtown Manhattan—you don't know that bastard!

SAM

(Laughs)

I know. (*Crooks his finger over an imaginary cigar and imitates KENSINGTON*) "Son, I go that far downtown, I get the bends."

MAURY

That's marvelous!

(SHARON and MAURY laugh as SAM does the imitation. BARBARA watches but doesn't crack a smile.)

## C A R E E R

SAM

"Never go uptown, either. Get above Fifty-ninth street and my nose bleeds!" (*SHARON and MAURY howl with laughter*) "Never go sideways, either. We got some very dangerous rivers around here!" (*Flicks ashes off his imaginary cigar. Does a double take at his crooked finger*) "Hey! Somebody stole my cigar!"

SHARON

(*Clapping her hands*)

Oh, that's Daddy all right! Daddy the bastard!

MAURY

Kensington to the teeth! Great, eh, Barbara?

BARBARA

I'm sorry I can't enjoy it, but I've never seen Mr. Kensington.

SHARON

Well, you have now, cookie dear. (*To SAM*) You're wonderful, Sam.

SAM

Thanks, Sharon.

SHARON

Sam! I love that name.

SAM

I know your father'd enjoy it, once he got down there. He's good. It's a new kind of theatre. He'd like it. I know he would.

C A R E E R

SHARON

(*Throws her arms around MAURY. Enthusiastically*)

That's a marvy idea. Daddy'll bring it uptown and we'll all  
be rich, rich, rich!

MAURY

(*Laughs*)

You're nutty.

SHARON

Then will you marry me? Maury, will you?

MAURY

Really nutty.

SHARON

If it happens—will you marry me? (*MAURY laughs. She steps back*) No, I'm serious! Will you?

MAURY

(*Looks at her*)

You are serious, aren't you?

SHARON

Yes! Yes! Promise me you'll do it!

MAURY

(*Laughs*)

Come on, Sharon.

SHARON

(*Pleading*)

If it runs as long as that hit you were in.

C A R E E R

MAURY

*Crocodile Tears?*

SHARON

Yes, *Crocodile Tears*. Will you marry me then?

MAURY

Okay, then I'll marry you.

SHARON

I love you! I—love—you!

MAURY

(Laughs)

You got yourself a real long shot. I'll probably never get near another play that runs as long as *Crocodile Tears*.

SHARON

You're mean!

SAM

How long did it run, Maury?

MAURY

Three hundred and sixty-eight performances.

SAM

(Crosses to bed, sits next to BARBARA)

Three hundred and sixty-eight performances! How about that, Barbara? Maury, will you explain to Barbara what it's really like to be in a hit?

## C A R E E R

MAURY

It's nice. *Crocodile Tears* was a real piece of commercial crap. But I must admit it was nice. The nicest part of it was feeling you were part of something to be proud of. I mean the theatre. Not *Crocodile Tears*.

SAM

I know. I know what you mean!

MAURY

It's like you worked in a small town where skilled craftsmen—and a few artists—made a special kind of pottery that was made nowhere else in the world. Nowhere else was the original creative work done. They took the originals and copied them in a million variations and turned them out in mass production and sold them all over the world. Even *Crocodile Tears*. Hollywood took it and has four others out now, just like it. But the originals can be found only one place. In those few city blocks, those few "small-town" blocks.

SHARON

(*Maudlin*)

Isn't he marvelous?

SAM

It must be great to work in the theatre every night.

BARBARA

How long did it run, Maury?

## C A R E E R

MAURY

Three hundred and sixty-eight performances. Forty-four and one-half weeks.

BARBARA

And you haven't worked in the year and a half since it closed?

MAURY

No, Barbara, you're right. I haven't.

BARBARA

(*Rises*)

My God. You'll have to excuse me. But I'm just appalled. I'm suddenly appalled!

SAM

(*Quietly*)

Barbara, you don't need to do this.

BARBARA

(*Bitterly*)

I'm sorry, but I come from a world where you don't even get a vacation till after you've worked a year. (*Sarcastically*) Let's be honest, Maury. Wouldn't it be a lot more practical if you just got a good steady job making pottery?

SHARON

And that's on one glass of wine! She could start a *war* on a hooker of bourbon.

C A R E E R

MAURY

We better go, Sam.

SAM

(*Rises, crosses to table*)

Maury, you don't have to—

BARBARA

I'm sorry. I'm tired.

MAURY

Sure. I understand. You have to get up early, don't you?

SHARON

(*Rising*)

We have to go to bed too, don't we, Maury?

MAURY

All right. All right. You've made your point. (*To BARBARA*)  
Thanks for everything.

SAM

It was swell of you to come over, Maury. And nice meeting  
you, Sharon.

SHARON

How sweet!

SAM

And the best time to bring your father to a performance  
would be the beginning of the week. Before he casts his play.

C A R E E R

SHARON

I'll try.

SAM

Great!

MAURY

(*Hesitant*)

Well—I'm afraid we're going to have to skip the possibility of his seeing it this week, Sam.

SAM

Why?

MAURY

Well, I didn't want to spoil a party, but—the old Seaman's Tabernacle may be dark this week.

SAM

You mean last night was the—last night?

MAURY

It's not for certain, but—I was talking to the guy in the box office. We didn't make next week's rent.

SAM

No!

MAURY

Goddamn old sailors want it in advance. We'll get it up for the following week, though. Or the week after that, for sure. Don't worry.

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Making an effort to cheer up*)

Oh, sure, I know. And don't *you* worry about it, Maury.

MAURY

We'll bounce back!

SAM

Sure we will.

MAURY

'Night, Sam.

SHARON

'Night, Sam. (*She gives him a long kiss and when she breaks away she is a bit tearful*) Sam. I lost it to a boy named Sam. He's a—

MAURY

(*Taking her arm*)

Yeah, yeah, we know! He's a pansy now. (*Taking her to the door*) Come on, Nymph.

SHARON

'Bye!

(*They exit. SAM turns back into the room and stands silently.*)

BARBARA

So the Actors' Rostrum is a thing of the past.

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Frowns but controls himself*)

Barbara, why did you have to chase them away like that?

BARBARA

I'm tired, Sam.

SAM

Maury's my friend.

BARBARA

Her, too?

SAM

(*Crosses to the table*)

Barbara, are you jealous?

BARBARA

I'm not jealous of anything except the way she can eat whenever she wants to!

SAM

(*Takes glasses and wine bottle to the cabinet and puts them away*)

We didn't come to New York yesterday. You've seen lots of girls like Sharon. They shouldn't bother you. They're just crazy. Why let a crazy girl like that bother you at this stage of the game?

BARBARA

(*Hesitantly*)

You got a letter from your mother today, Sam.

C A R E E R

S A M

Oh.

B A R B A R A

I was late going to work, and the mail was early. It was addressed to you.

S A M

Where is it?

B A R B A R A

(*Digs under the bed for her purse, opens it and hands him the letter*)

I opened it, Sam. I didn't notice it was just to you. It's just the usual kind of mother letter. (*Almost quoting*) They had pot roast Sunday. That tall girl your cousin Edgar was engaged to—the one with the spaces between her teeth . . .

S A M

Elizabeth Moon.

B A R B A R A

They got married last week. It was a lovely wedding. Oh, yes, your father's been pretty sick. He's getting better but things aren't so good. So there's no check for five dollars this week. But as soon as she can she'll start sending it again each week. (*Pause*) And she wants you to give me her love. How long has she been sending us the money? From the beginning?

S A M

No! The interviewing job wasn't—

C A R E E R

BARBARA

How long, Sam?

SAM

About six months ago Mom sent a check for five dollars. I didn't ask her for it. She's been sending it every week. I still do the interviewing job as early and as late as possible. You know that.

BARBARA

But you didn't stop her from sending the money?

SAM

No, I didn't stop her.

BARBARA

What is it, Sam? Is it a disease?

SAM

(*Angry*)

So you didn't mean it when you said you wouldn't marry anybody but an actor?

BARBARA

(*Turns to the window*)

Let me think about that. Let me walk out onto the terrace of my penthouse apartment and think about that.

SAM

Barbara, I hate this. Don't you see that? I feel terrible every day I come home and know I haven't come through for you? So I just keep trying. But now all I can do is say I'm sorry.

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

(*Turns to him*)

Sam, let's go home. (*SAM turns away*) Not for my sake, but for yours. Don't throw your life away on something that doesn't care whether you live or die.

SAM

Barbara, this *is* my life.

BARBARA

You've tried. God knows, you've tried.

SAM

Maybe something will happen with the group—

BARBARA

Other people have left and been happy. You're not happy here.

SAM

The Actors' Rostrum. It isn't dead yet. We'll get the money for the rent. Maybe it'll get going to the point where they can pay some salaries.

BARBARA

So you can sit around for the rest of your life over cheap wine and talk about Stanislavsky and the small group of artists who mold the pottery of the entertainment world?

## C A R E E R

SAM

Why do you turn on me just now? Just when things are at their worst? Is it because that girl was here?

BARBARA

No, Sam.

SAM

Is it some silly girl reason like that?

BARBARA

No!

SAM

Is it because—

BARBARA

It's because it isn't just the two of us any more. (*sam just stands, looking at her*) I didn't know for sure until today. I wanted to tell you tonight—and we could celebrate with Marjorie and Allan. (*Pause*) It takes money even to *keep* from having a baby. (*Goes to him*) Oh, Sam, I want to be alive, too! (*Puts her arms around him*) Please don't be unhappy, please!

(*They sit on the bed.*)

SAM

When?

BARBARA

A long time yet. Oh, be happy, sweetheart. It's a baby. It's like something holy happening to us.

## C A R E E R

SAM

How much time have we got? I mean, to go along like this?

BARBARA

I could work for a while, I guess. We'll need money to get home.

SAM

Barbara, you've got to give me another month. To try and get in a play.

BARBARA

So it'll be two years and seven months you've tried?

SAM

Please, Barbara. It's all I ask.

BARBARA

Then will you promise?

SAM

Yes.

*(They hold each other tightly.)*

BARBARA

Let's go to bed. We're both tired.

SAM

It isn't ten o'clock.

## CAREER

BARBARA

(*Rising*)

The more sleep you get the less food you need. Just like extra food can take the place of sleep—up to a point. At least that's what I keep telling myself. (*She walks out of the room to another part of the apartment. Calls out*) What?

SAM

I didn't say anything.

BARBARA

(*Off*)

I thought I heard you say something.

SAM

I was praying.

BARBARA

(*Off*)

What were you praying for? Sam, what were you praying for?

SAM

(*Quietly*)

A job.

(*The lights fade and come up again on another area of the stage. One month has passed. A beat-up receptionist's desk stands in the light of an unflattering lamp. There is a moment's silence and then SHIRLEY DRAKE, the agent, walks into the lighted area, as though coming from an*

## CAREER

*inner office. She is a woman in her middle thirties. She is wearing a hat, eating a sandwich and drinking a glass of milk. She peers into the shadows beyond the lighted area, aware that someone is standing there.)*

SHIRLEY

Yes, who is it?

SAM

Miss Drake?

SHIRLEY

I can't see anyone. (*sam moves forward as shirley sits at the desk*) You have to have an appointment.

SAM

I happened to be in the neighborhood.

SHIRLEY

I can't see anyone without an appointment.

SAM

I'm an actor.

SHIRLEY

Well, that's a shock.

SAM

If I could just have a minute—

SHIRLEY

A minute? I just might tell you a minute's worth of truth that would be very painful. This is just the day for it.

## C A R E E R

S A M

I've got to talk to you. You're—this is my last chance!

S H I R L E Y

Let's get one thing straight. I'm nobody's last chance!

S A M

You're an agent. You could help me.

S H I R L E Y

You think so? (*Holds up her sandwich*) Do I look like I'm in Sardi's?

S A M

I was wondering if there were any replacements coming up in any shows—

S H I R L E Y

Look—(*Stops, looks at him closely*) Have you been in here before?

S A M

No. I spoke to you once. For a moment. My name is Sam Lawson.

S H I R L E Y

Let me tell you something, Sam. In this Year of Our Lord Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-three there are exactly eleven attractions open for business in New York City. Only three of them are making any money. Two of these have casts of less than nine people, and the other's a musical. Can you sing? Can you dance?

## C A R E E R

SAM

I'm an actor, Miss Drake.

SHIRLEY

(*Rises, crosses around desk, shows him the door*)

It's no loss. There's nobody's going to be foolish enough to leave a hit musical in December anyway.

SAM

What about the plays?

SHIRLEY

(*Turns to him*)

There's only one part in either of them that you'd possibly be right for by the farthest stretch of the imagination.

SAM

What's that?

SHIRLEY

What Dickie Jerrold does in *Dark Wedding*.

SAM

Is he leaving?

SHIRLEY

Dickie Jerrold's been on this street for ten years. He's got more sense than to leave a hit show. And even if he should leave, there are twenty juveniles who've played big parts—big parts—who'd be on the producer's doorstep inside of a minute after it was announced. Now have you got any idea of what I can do for you?

## C A R E E R

SAM

*Is he leaving?*

SHIRLEY

*(Hesitates, then goes back around desk and sits again)*  
My God, you're an actor all right!

SAM

The others might not be right for the part.

SHIRLEY

*(Patiently)*

If he *should* leave—some of those other juveniles are clients of mine. *(Hesitates)* But I *am* going to help you.

SAM

*(Eagerly)*

Miss Drake!

SHIRLEY

Go home!

SAM

*(Shakes his head)*

I can't.

SHIRLEY

Why not?

SAM

I'm going to be a star some day.

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

It's impossible.

SAM

People become stars.

SHIRLEY

People escape from sunken submarines, too.

SAM

I'll have to take that chance.

SHIRLEY

My God! Isn't the handwriting on the wall?

SAM

I haven't been able to get my foot in yet! Like with you. I wrote you and called you, but I was never able to see you till today.

SHIRLEY

Well, now you've seen me. (*Intensely*) Don't you see what exists? What makes you think anyone would pay three dollars and thirty cents to see you?

SAM

(*Sarcastically*)

I don't look like Eric Peters!

SHIRLEY

Exactly.





## C A R E E R

SAM

But I can act.

SHIRLEY

(Rises)

They wouldn't pay fifty-five cents to see you at the Actors' Rostrum.

SAM

(Turns away)

I know. I know. (Suddenly turns back) How did you know we charged fifty—

SHIRLEY

I saw you.

SAM

You did? Well, what—how—

SHIRLEY

How were you? You were good. You lack experience, of course, but you have talent. But it doesn't matter if you have talent or not. That's not the point. I had—believe it or not—a great deal of talent. The seasons of twenty-one through twenty-four I was out of work a total of four and one-half weeks. Good parts. In good shows. That was before the Depression, of course. Good times. Then twenty-four through twenty-six I didn't work at all. Not one week. Those were still good times. But I stayed. On the fringes of the only thing I knew anything about at all. The precious theatre. And do you know what I've got today? This. And Florence and Agnes. Florence is my mother.

## C A R E E R

I don't like her much and she doesn't like me much. And Agnes is my mother's cat. I can't stand her, and she *hates* me! It's not much, is it? Just a little bit better than nothing.

SAM

Miss Drake, I beg you!

(*She looks at him for a long time and then puts her face in her hands.*)

SHIRLEY

If I could help you, it would only be a reprieve.

SAM

Can you?

SHIRLEY

Don't be so full of hope. I say, if I *could*. The final ending of the story would be the same anyway.

SAM

No, it *won't*.

SHIRLEY

You ever stage manage?

SAM

Yes.

SHIRLEY

You saw Kensington?

## CAREER

SAM

They're all cast. They go into rehearsal next Monday.

SHIRLEY

They need an assistant stage manager who can also understudy. Kensington owes me a favor.

SAM

(*Unable to believe it*)

Miss Drake!

SHIRLEY

I shouldn't waste a favor like this. But go on. He'll be at the theatre now. I'll call him. (*sam stands speechless*) I can't guarantee it. Well, go on!

SAM

(*Turns and starts quickly toward the door. At the edge of the lighted area he stops and turns back. There is a smile of excitement and conviction on his face. He points his finger at her*)

*I knew there was a job.*

SHIRLEY

(*Quietly, almost sadly*)

Yes. I knew you did. You could almost smell it, couldn't you? (*sam nods. He stands a moment, then turns and dashes out of the lighted area. SHIRLEY looks after him and then shakes her head. She picks up the telephone and begins to dial*) Yes, you have to have that.

(*The lights fade and come up again on the cold-water*

## CAREER

*flat. BARBARA sits at the table, taking disinterested sips from a cup of coffee. She thinks for a few moments, then rises slowly and walks to the bed. She hesitates, then kneels down and takes from beneath the bed a battered suitcase, puts it on the bed, opens it and begins packing. She stops, stands unsteadily for a moment and then moves down to the table and eases herself into the chair.)*

SAM

(Off)

Barbara! Barbara! (*She doesn't answer. He comes closer*)  
Barbara! (*He bursts into the lighted area, sees her and moves quickly to her*) Barbara, it happened! I got a job! A real job! In Kensington's new play! (*He stops*) Honey, what is it? What's the matter?

BARBARA

(Crying, runs to him)

Oh, Sam, they said it wasn't even a baby yet. Isn't that an awful thing to say?

SAM

What?

BARBARA

I was just walking along the street. A police car took me to the hospital.

SAM

Barbara, what happened?

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

I lost the baby. And they said it wasn't even a baby yet.

SAM

(Leads her to a chair and seats her. He kneels)

Oh, honey, don't worry. There'll be other babies.

BARBARA

Sam, I can't take this any longer. We haven't got anything.  
Nothing! And we never will! Not this way.

SAM

(Comforting her)

Honey, honey—

BARBARA

(Rises, crosses to bed, sits and begins packing)

It's no use, Sam. I'm going home.

SAM

(Comes to her, kneels beside bed)

Honey, you're tired and sick and you feel like it's the end of the world. But it isn't. It's the beginning. Really it is. Barbara, you need rest. When you've rested, everything will look different. Honey, don't you understand? We don't need to go home now.

BARBARA

No, Sam, no, I don't understand.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Didn't you hear what I said? I got a job! I really did! I actually got a job!

BARBARA

I'm going home, Sam. Are you coming with me?

(*They sit silently, staring at each other.*)

*Curtain*

## ACT TWO



## ACT TWO

*It is the year 1940. Seven years have passed.*

*SHIRLEY DRAKE, the agent, is seated in her office. She looks older, of course, and somewhat more prosperous—her clothes and her office furnishings indicate she is doing better professionally. She now has an intercom.*

SHIRLEY

(*Into intercom*)

Marie, show Mr. Novak right in when he gets here. Don't keep him waiting. My God, yes! Miracle of miracles! Send him in.

(*She turns to see SAM LAWSON enter. He is now thirty-one, but has not changed much. He is rather well dressed and seems in good spirits.*)

SAM

Hello, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Well, have I been having a time finding you! Where have you been hiding? I couldn't get you at the last number I had—the one you gave me a few months back, so—

SAM

(*Exuberantly*)

Shirley, I haven't seen you in years! That's why I was sur-

## CAREER

prised when I stopped by the old apartment and saw a message from you.

SHIRLEY

Tsk, tsk, tsk.

SAM

How's Agnes?

SHIRLEY

She died a year and a half ago.

SAM

Oh, I'm terribly sorry.

SHIRLEY

(*Looks puzzled for a moment*)

Oh, no. Agnes was the cat. Florence is my mother.

SAM

(*Laughs*)

That's better. How's she?

SHIRLEY

About the same. She's got a new cat. Constance. Constance hates me more than Agnes did. So things are pretty much the same. (*Shakes her head*) Where have you been?

SAM

Last thing, I was out on the road with *Party Favor*.

C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

You were?

SAM

I was with it for a year and a half.

SHIRLEY

You were? (SAM nods) That one-night-stand tour?

SAM

Saw America.

SHIRLEY

How time does fly! How was the tour? (SAM starts to speak. She interrupts) Well, that doesn't matter now. It's over. Tell you what I wanted to see you about. I was going through an old picture file and I saw your picture and I thought of you. (SAM smiles) Kensington's doing a new show. You worked for him once, didn't you?

SAM

(Nods)

Assistant stage manager, and understudied four parts. It was my first job. You got it for me, remember? It closed out of town during the tryout. Nineteen thirty-three. Seven years ago.

SHIRLEY

I thought that was the show. Well, what put two and two together: Maurice Novak's coming back from Hollywood to direct, and there's a part in it—the male lead. You'd be just right for it.

## C A R E E R

S A M

Maury Novak?

S H I R L E Y

Didn't you used to be in a group downtown that he directed, or something?

S A M

The Actors' Rostrum. (*Smiles and nods his head*) Maury Novak.

S H I R L E Y

The show doesn't go into rehearsal till late in the fall, but he's got six months worth of picture commitments so he wants to get it out of the way now. The casting, that is. Kensington pushed me into his path, thank God, so he's coming in here today. And I just had a hunch—you know, old friends and all that. It never hurts.

S A M

That'd be great.

S H I R L E Y

Now, don't get your hopes up. He may have a lot of California people in mind for it. But at least you can see him.

S A M

Maury Novak—

M A U R Y

(*Off*)

Sam Lawson.

(SAM rises. MAURY enters the lighted area. Seven years

## C A R E E R

*(have taken him from second-hand suits to the three-hundred-and-fifty-dollar variety.)*

SHIRLEY

Well, hello, Mr. Novak!

MAURY

Shirley.

SAM

Maury, you have got a memory!

MAURY

*(Shaking hands)*

Sure have. How are you?

SAM

Fine, fine! Well, Maury Novak!

*(They look at each other and shake their heads as people do who haven't seen each other for a long time and can't think of anything to say.)*

SHIRLEY

*(Finally)*

I thought Sam might be right for the play.

MAURY

I can't do anything about casting today. I've got to meet a friend. If you've got a list of people you think would be right, let me look at it over the week end and screen it out, and we'll put our heads together on Monday.

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

Here are some of my ideas. Some of these people I know Kensington won't want to pay, but there's no harm in trying.

(She hands him the list.)

MAURY

(Looking at it)

Hmmmm—Couple of not bad ideas here. I'll talk to you on Monday.

SAM

Look, Maury, how about lunch on Monday? I'm free any time.

MAURY

Well, lunch is for business with me, but—(Stops) Say, do you remember Sharon Kensington?

SAM

Sure. You brought her to our apartment one time. My God, it must have been at the time of the Actors' Rostrum.

MAURY

That's who I'm going to meet. Sharon Kensington.

SAM

I thought she lived out west somewhere.

MAURY

Texas. But she divorced him because she couldn't stand to be away from New York. Her psychiatrist is here.

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Laughs*)

Maury, you kill me. The same old Maury.

MAURY

(*Seriously*)

No, that's a fact. I met her on the Coast before she went to Reno.

SAM

She was always crazy about you. I remember—

MAURY

(*Looks at his watch*)

I'm meeting her over at O'Brien's for cocktails at five-thirty. But you know women. They're always late. Especially Sharon. Come on along and we'll chew the fat until she gets there.

SAM

Swell!

MAURY

(*Starting out*)

Monday, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Any time at all, Mr. Novak. I'm at your complete disposal.

MAURY

Come on, Sam.

(*As they go, SAM looks back at SHIRLEY. She elaborately*

## CAREER

*crosses her fingers. He smiles at her and follows MAURY. The lights fade. The lights come up again on O'Brien's Restaurant, showing the same table we saw in Act One. O'Brien's stock in trade is a retention of the past, and the atmosphere and décor do not change from year to year. It looks the same in 1940 as it will look in 1956. SAM and MAURY enter, and SAM throws his raincoat over a chair. CHARLEY MARSALLA, the waiter, enters. He is sixteen years younger than he was in Act One.)*

MAURY

Sit down, Sam.

CHARLEY

Nice to see you back in town, Mr. Novak.

MAURY

(Sits)

Nice to be back, Charley. Scotch and water.

CHARLEY

(To SAM)

You, sir?

SAM

(Sits)

The same.

CHARLEY

Two Scotch and water.

C A R E E R

SAM

(*To MAURY*)

I see you've taken to the sauce in your old age.

MAURY

Once in a while you need it. (*To CHARLEY*) If a blond lady shows up, we're back here.

CHARLEY

Right.

(*He exits.*)

SAM

Sharon Kensington. How does she look?

MAURY

Same.

SAM

Hasn't changed a bit, I'll bet.

MAURY

Not a bit.

SAM

Say, Maury, you certainly have done some good things on the Coast. I've seen some of your pictures— They're great.

MAURY

(*Enthusiastically*)

Did you see *Flame at Dawn*?

C A R E E R

S A M

I loved it!

M A U R Y

So did I. Wish I'd directed it.

S A M

(*Momentarily taken aback. Then he laughs*)

Okay, score one.

(*MAURY looks up at him, puzzled. CHARLEY arrives with the drinks.*)

C H A R L E Y

Two Scotch and water.

M A U R Y

Tell you what, Charley, might as well bring up two more while you're at it.

C H A R L E Y

Yes, sir.

(*He exits.*)

S A M

When you need it, you need it.

M A U R Y

That's right.

S A M

(*Raising his glass*)

Here's to the new play. Or should I say the new piece of pottery.

## C A R E E R

MAURY

(*Tosses off most of the drink, making a face at its taste. He sits silently. Then*)

I'll take your good wishes on the play. I want to open Christmas night and get great notices. You know why? I've got a new contract with the studio coming up the first of the year. I want to take those notices and beat my salary up so high that every once in a while they'll have to let me do a script like *Flame at Dawn* just to keep me from being unhappy. Does that sound ass-backward? An expensive guy costs more money when he sulks. (*Finishes his drink*) I still like good pottery, Sam. More than ever. Nothing else really counts much.

SAM

(*Sardonically*)

It's nice to see the theatre can be useful.

MAURY

It's *gotta* be! Even a thing like the Actors' Rostrum. It folded, but through some people who were behind it I got a chance to go out to California as a cutter.

SAM

Yeah, I heard about that at the time.

MAURY

(*Laughs*)

My old man was all puffed up. Even when I told him I was going to be a film cutter, not a garment cutter, he still liked it. He was disappointed when I got to be a director. We weren't

## C A R E E R

in the same line of work any more. (CHARLEY arrives with two fresh drinks) Thanks, Charley.

(*He takes a drink.*)

S A M

Say, Maury, Shirley talked to me about your play. She—

M A U R Y

(*Interrupting*)

Say, what about *you*? How's it been? How's—Barbara? It is Barbara, isn't it?

S A M

Barbara. She's fine. I got a card from her at Christmas.

M A U R Y

Where is she?

S A M

In Lansing. Got a couple of kids now. A boy, five, and a girl, two. And another one on the way, according to her card.

M A U R Y

I didn't even know—

S A M

Yeah, we broke up. Just after the first show I was in. For Kensington. It flopped.

M A U R Y

I remember that.

## C A R E E R

SAM

She married an awfully nice guy, I hear. I've never met him, but I hear he's a nice guy. He's got a Chevrolet agency. Does pretty well.

MAURY

He would, with a Chevrolet agency. She was a nice girl.

SAM

Yes, she was. *Party Favor* played Detroit. But she didn't get a chance to get over. You know. Kids and all.

MAURY

You play *Party Favor* here in New York?

SAM

No, the road tour. A year and a half. Alive and wide-awake eight times a week for a year and a half. (*Takes a drink*) Say, Maury, I've been in—six New York flops since I saw you last.

MAURY

You know who's the real genius in the theatre?

SAM

Who?

MAURY

The guy who writes the program notes. To be able to take an actor who's been in six flops in eight years and make it look like he was so busy he didn't have time to turn around.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Those were Depression years.

MAURY

There's always a depression for actors.

SAM

Yeah—Say, Shirley was—she spoke to me about your show.

MAURY

(*Indicating drink*)

I'm going to have another one of these. How about you?

SAM

Sure. (*MAURY motions to waiter*) She said there was something I might be right for. The male lead, as a matter of fact.

MAURY

Yeah, you're the type, all right. Age, and everything.

SAM

It'd be great. I mean us working together again.

(*CHARLEY arrives.*)

MAURY

(*To CHARLEY*)

Do it again.

CHARLEY

Yes, Mr. Novak.

(*He exits.*)

## CAREER

SAM

When are you holding readings, Maury?

MAURY

That isn't set yet.

SAM

It'll have to be soon, won't it? If you're going back to the Coast.

MAURY

Take it easy, boy. We won't go into production for six, seven months.

SAM

But if you want it cast—(*MAURY takes a stiff drink*) I'd give my arm to read for it, Maury. I mean that.

MAURY

Sam—

(*They are interrupted by an off-stage voice calling out, "Baby doll!" SAM and MAURY turn at the sound of the voice. ERIC PETERS walks into the lighted area. He has gone onward and upward since we saw him last. He is now one of the biggest movie stars in America. He still looks too handsome to be true. His clothes are contemporary California-eccentric. He is flamboyant, egocentric and—to be kind—a touch effete. He is accompanied by his manager, PINKIE BONAPARTE. PINKIE BONAPARTE looks like a well-heeled ex-prize fighter. He attends ERIC like a nursemaid, watering his ego and rubbing his back whenever he gets a*

## C A R E E R

*chance. ERIC approaches the table, his left hand extended to MAURY.)*

ERIC

*(Shaking hands with MAURY and kissing him on the forehead)*  
How are you, sweetheart!

MAURY

Eric, baby! What are you doing in town?

ERIC

My new picture's opening at the Rivoli tonight. (*Turns and calls to PINKIE*) Pinkie, look who's east of Pasadena.

MAURY

Hello, Pinkie.

*(They shake hands.)*

PINKIE

*(Kisses MAURY on forehead)*

Hello, angel! How's my favorite director?

MAURY

This is Sam Lawson. Eric Peters. Pinkie Bonaparte.

ERIC

*(Shakes hands with SAM)*

A pleasure.

C A R E E R

S A M

Nice to meet you, Eric. I remember you from way back. You used to be a client of Shirley Drake's, weren't you?

E R I C

(*Thinking*)

Shirley who?

S A M

Shirley Drake. She was your agent. It was a long time ago. Years—

P I N K I E

(*Frowning*)

Hey, Novak, who's your friend? Captain Kidd? (*To S A M*) He's got himself an agent, kid. That's hot news. Remember it.

S A M

(*Confused at the hostility*)

I didn't—

P I N K I E

(*Laughs and slaps him on the back*)

Sure you didn't.

E R I C

(*To MAURY*)

Now tell all. What are you doing in this dreary town?

M A U R Y

Casting. I'm staging a new play in the fall.

C A R E E R

ERIC

Oh, God, how I envy you! I'd give blood to do a play!

PINKIE

He means that. He really does. That's from the heart. But we just can't afford it.

ERIC

Who would support all those Warner Brothers?

PINKIE

(Laughs heartily at ERIC's joke)

Come on, baby, we gotta haul ass. (*Steps to MAURY*) Like to see the picture tonight?

MAURY

I caught a rough cut on the Coast.

PINKIE

(Beaming)

What did you think? (*MAURY blows a kiss. To ERIC*) Didn't I tell you!

ERIC

I always *hate* my own work.

PINKIE

Every great artist does. (*To MAURY*) Don't let 'em keep you here, doll. The picture business needs every first-rate genius it's got.

C A R E E R

MAURY

I won't, Pinkie.

PINKIE

I mean that. (*To ERIC*) That's the God's truth, isn't it?

ERIC

(*To MAURY*)

That's from the heart. You're one of the great ones.

MAURY

Well, thanks, Eric. You know how I feel about you.

PINKIE

(*Shakes hands with SAM*)

It's been a pleasure, sincerely.

ERIC

(*To SAM*)

Loved it, really.

PINKIE

(*To ERIC*)

Let's go. There's three thousand screaming broads standing outside the Rivoli Theatre waitin' to bite your underwear off.

ERIC

'Bye. 'Bye.

(*They wave and exit happily. SAM looks after them for a long moment and then turns back to MAURY.*)

## C A R E E R

SAM

That's amazing.

MAURY

What?

SAM

They're both left-handed.

MAURY

Eric Peters earns six thousand dollars a week!

SAM

Now, Maury, come off it. Nobody—absolutely nobody—*earns* six thousand dollars a week!

MAURY

(Exploding)

Goddamn it, why don't you get off my back!

SAM

What?

MAURY

Stop chipping away at me!

SAM

I made a joke.

MAURY

Chipping away at me! Chipping! Chipping! Chipping!  
That's what you've been doing ever since we sat down!

C A R E E R

S A M

If you feel that way, I'm sorry.

M A U R Y

Is it my fault that those clucks came over here with all that baby doll crap?

S A M

(Quietly)

No.

M A U R Y

Then don't bug me!

S A M

Let's just forget it, shall me? (Rises) See you around.

(He turns to go.)

M A U R Y

(Grabs SAM's arm)

Sam, don't. I apologize. Sit down. Please. (SAM hesitates, then sits. MAURY looks at his glass) It's this stuff. I've had too much of it. Look. About the play. My play. Jesus, we're still friends, aren't we? In spite of all the years. (SAM nods) Can I level with you?

S A M

You mean like the old joke: "Can you stand a little honest criticism? You're fired."

M A U R Y

No jokes.

## CAREER

SAM

Okay, level.

MAURY

I'm not going to ask you to read for the part, because you wouldn't play it.

SAM

Why not?

MAURY

You wouldn't play it because you're not right.

SAM

But you said—

MAURY

I said you were the right type. And you're good. You were good eight years ago. You're probably better now. But—the part needs a name. A star.

SAM

You mean Maury Novak needs a star! An insurance policy against failure.

MAURY

No! An annuity! With the pay-off being some day a chance to do another *Flame at Dawn*.

SAM

(Desperately)

Try me! A part like this could *make* me a star!

C A R E E R

MAURY

(*Shakes his head*)

I can't—

SAM

Then what the hell is my career? A shuttle train to nowhere?  
I can't get the part because I'm not a star! I'm not a star because  
I can't get the part!

MAURY

That's right.

SAM

Then how the hell am I going to make it?

MAURY

I don't know. Maybe you won't make it. Maybe you haven't  
got it.

SAM

Oh, Maury! I've got talent. You know that.

MAURY

Talent! Talent's not what I'm talking about. That's what you  
start with. I'm talking about that extra whatever it is that it  
takes to get off that shuttle. Con, moxie, *chutspah*. Whatever  
you want to call it.

SAM

I know what you mean. The politics. The office manner. The  
cocktail party crap. I can't do it. I've never been able to do it.

C A R E E R

MAURY

Then *learn!* Or get out!

SAM

But when there's a part!

MAURY

You haven't learned in eight years. Maybe you'll never learn. If you can't—then stop throwing good years after bad. Stop beating your head against a stone wall. How old are you?

SAM

Twenty-ni—I'm thirty-one. (*MAURY laughs. SAM slams his fist down on the table*) Maury, you've got to give me this chance!

MAURY

No. Sam, try and understand.

SAM

(*Rises*)

I'll do better than that, Maury. I'll try and learn.

(*He exits. MAURY puts his head down on his arms.*)

CHARLEY

(*Entering*)

Still want that drink, Mr. Novak?

MAURY

Nope. I've got no use for it now.

(*CHARLEY begins to clear the table.*)

## CAREER

SHARON

(*Off*)

Stop! (*CHARLEY and MAURY look up as SHARON enters. She is high, and she looks very lovely*) Let me see that glass! Not his. The other one.

(*CHARLEY is puzzled but he hands her the glass. She examines the rim.*)

MAURY

Don't worry. There's no lipstick on it.

SHARON

(*Slips into the seat next to him and puts her arms around him*) I'm sorry, baby. I'm sorry.

MAURY

You didn't expect to find any, did you?

SHARON

I'm sorry.

(*She hugs him tighter.*)

MAURY

(*Pushing her away*)

Good God, Sharon. Let me go!

SHARON

(*Hurt, she sits back*)

Maury, don't hate me, please. I just wanted to touch you.

C A R E E R

MAURY

Sharon, I don't feel well. I feel lousy.

SHARON

I make you feel lousy.

MAURY

(*Impatient*)

Stop it!

SHARON

I need a drink. (*To CHARLEY*) Waiter! Double Scotch. (*He exits*) Why do I make you feel lousy?

MAURY

(*Protesting*)

Stop it!

(SAM enters. They look up at him.)

SAM

Excuse me, I forgot my coat.

SHARON

Hello.

MAURY

Sam Lawson. You remember him.

SHARON

(*She doesn't*)

Of course.

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Taking his coat*)

Nice seeing you again. Good-bye.

(*He turns to go.*)

SHARON

Don't go. Stay, please. Please stay. He's not going to be any fun.

MAURY

(*Rises. Thickly*)

That's right. *He's* not going to be any fun. Excuse me for a minute. For just one minute.

(*He exits.*)

SHARON

My God, he's drunk! Maury Novak is drunk! (*Looks at SAM*) I've never seen him like that before. You must be a good influence.

SAM

He had to get drunk.

SHARON

What for?

SAM

So he could tell me—I'm not going to make it.

SHARON

Are you? Are you going to make it?

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Looking at her for a moment*)

Yes.

(*He sits.*)

SHARON

Good for you. Bastards like Maury make me sick. Like my father. They make some money so they think they're the last word on what's good and what's bad in people and things.  
(CHARLEY arrives with the drink) Is that a double?

CHARLEY

Yes, ma'am.

(*He exits.*)

SHARON

Good. I've been drinking doubles all afternoon, and it's not good for you to switch.

SAM

I thought you went to see your psychiatrist.

SHARON

No. No. I canceled that appointment. I finally hit him where he lives. I called him and I said, "Doctor, I won't be able to see you today because my horoscope forbids me to leave the house."  
(SAM laughs) They're all alike.

SAM

Who?

C A R E E R

SHARON

You too, probably. Oh, that's awful. I've just met you this minute and I'm calling you a bastard!

SAM

We met a long time ago.

SHARON

(*Looks at him*)

It's awful, I don't remember you.

SAM

I remember you.

SHARON

You're sweet. (*Leans over and kisses him on the cheek*)  
Where is that bastard Maury?

SAM

Seven, eight years ago.

SHARON

(*Holds her ears*)

Oh, God, don't tell me what I did! I get the cold sweats about everything I ever did.

SAM

You didn't do anything wrong.

SHARON

You're sweet, and if you're lying I don't want to know it.  
Talk about the future all you want, but please don't talk about the past.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Okay, what are you going to do with the future?

SHARON

I'm going to drink Scotch and I'm going to smoke cigarettes, and I'm going to be very good at it.

SAM

Is that all?

SHARON

Don't make a pass. I'm the one who makes the passes! (*Shakes her head*) My God, I'm being so aggressive with you. That means I like you. Wait'll I tell Freud. He'll say it's a father transference. That's his answer to everything. The bastard! (*Takes a drink*) This isn't a double! Waiter! (*Finishes off remains of the drink*) Sneaky. Probably charged us for a double. Do you realize that on English ships you can buy the best Scotch there is for ninety-eight cents a fifth?

SAM

I'd imagine.

SHARON

(*Leans over to him*)

Let's take an English ship and go around the world and drink the best Scotch there is for ninety-eight cents a fifth. We'll have to take our own cigarettes.

CHARLEY

(*Coming up to table*)

Yes, ma'am.

C A R E E R

SHARON

Did you charge us for doubles?

CHARLEY

That's a double, ma'am.

SHARON

Then bring us doubles.

CHARLEY

Yes, ma'am.

(*He starts to go.*)

SHARON

And, waiter, go to the boys' room and tell Mr. Novak he's being rude.

CHARLEY

Yes, ma'am.

(*He exits.*)

SHARON

That Maury! I'm going to tell him a piece of my mind. They all think they're so high and mighty! Then I'm going around the world on an English ship and drink Scotch. You want to come?

SAM

Can't be done.

SHARON

Think of the money we'll save.

## C A R E E R

SAM

There's a war on.

SHARON

We'll sit in the bow with a fifth of Scotch a piece and a pitcher of ice water and we'll see the world. My God, there must be *something* to see!

SAM

Ships aren't going around the world.

SHARON

What?

SAM

There's a war going on.

SHARON

(*Looks at him for a moment. Then, with great bitterness*)  
Wouldn't they just do something like that!

CHARLEY

(*Enters with drinks*)

I'm sorry, miss, but Mr. Novak left. The hostess saw him leave.

SHARON

(*Rising*)

You're lying to me. He *can't*!

CHARLEY

Sorry, miss.

(*He sets the drink down.*)

C A R E E R

SHARON

That bastard! (*CHARLEY exits*) That's an awful trick to play on a lady.

(*She starts to cry.*)

SAM

Take it easy, Sharon.

SHARON

(*Pulls herself together*)

Don't worry! I'm not going to cry over *that* son of a bitch.

(*She takes a drink.*)

SAM

That's right.

SHARON

Sure. It's not worth it. I'll show him! Take me home—

SAM

Sam.

SHARON

(*Smiles*)

Sam. (*Leans over to him and kisses him intensely*) So it shouldn't be a total loss—take me home. (*Laughs*) I told you I made the passes.

SAM

That's right, you did.

## C A R E E R

SHARON

Take me home, Sam.

SAM

Don't you want to finish your drink?

SHARON

(*Picks up her drink and pours it on the table*)

There!

(*She begins to laugh. SAM looks at her for a moment, then he picks up his drink and pours it on the table. SHARON thinks this is the funniest thing she has ever seen. SAM laughs, too, as the lights fade and come up again on another section of the stage, showing the living room of SHARON's apartment. It is expensively and tastefully furnished. SAM and ROBERT KENSINGTON, the producer, enter together. SAM sits down on one of the chairs. It is now a few weeks later.*)

KENSINGTON

You're in very mediocre company, my friend. Sharon's first husband was the worst office boy I ever had. When she was in Mexico divorcing him she met a no-good pup who ran a twenty-one game. He was her second husband. The last one was a rich moron. An oil-rich moron. You like the company? Why did you marry her, anyway? You could have just gone on living with her. You think that's an ignoble thing for a father to say? Well, Sharon Kensington's father isn't equipped to imitate the sentiments of the average father. You should hear the things I could say! (*Looks at SAM for a long moment*) You're an actor, I hear.

## C A R E E R

S A M

I worked for you once.

K E N S I N G T O N

So I hear. I don't remember you.

S A M

None of the Kensingtions remember me at first.

K E N S I N G T O N

I know actors. I used to *be* an actor. I was an actor when I was eight years old. I was in the crowd when they burned Rome in *Quo Vadis*. I threw stones on a tin sheet ten performances a week, and then the stage manager wouldn't pay us our twenty-five cents on Saturday night. Oh, I know actors and I hate 'em! They have no idea of what it takes to make a career in this business. I know. I made one! I was a press agent. And I managed a vaudeville house and then a circuit. A whole circuit! And I learned about plays. And I learned about money! And I made a success! I've presented fourteen successful productions in my career on Broadway. But I did it by sweat and labor. *Not* by marrying the boss's daughter! So if you think that'll do it, you're sadly mistaken, my friend. Not while *I'm* the boss. All you'll get is very sadly mistaken!

(*The lights fade and come up again on SHIRLEY DRAKE at her desk. Six months have passed. SAM enters the lighted area and walks up to SHIRLEY. She holds a sheaf of contracts. His manner is tense throughout the scene.*)

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

The sponsor's already signed these contracts. You want to look them over?

SAM

(*Sitting down*)

Thanks.

(*He takes the contracts and begins reading them.*)

SHIRLEY

Congratulations on your semi-anniversary. (*sam looks up*) You've been married six months today.

SAM

(*Thinks a moment*)

That's right. How did you remember that?

SHIRLEY

I read it. (*Gets up, picks up a newspaper from the top of a file cabinet, and reads*) "Sharon Kensington Lawson—she's his daughter—and hubby Sam—he's lead on *Mr. American*, up and coming radio drama produced by pop-in-law for Continental Foods—are celebrating one half year married in the silliest way. He's in Gotham—she's in Hollywood dangling from the arm of Maurice Novak, screen megaphoner—Hmmmmm." (*Looks up at sam*) Hmmmmm is spelled H-m-m-m-m-m. They shouldn't be allowed to write things like that.

SAM

That doesn't mean anything. Sharon wanted a vacation. Maury's an old friend. They'll print anything to fill up space.

C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

(*Sits again*)

Sure.

SAM

Did Maury cast that play yet?

SHIRLEY

No, Sam. The play's not cast—The radio contracts look all right to you?

SAM

Does it definitely state that air time will be Sunday night?  
(SHIRLEY nods) And did you get the clause about the right to take off four weeks for an out-of-town tryout if I should get a play?

SHIRLEY

Yes, but I had a tough time doing it. The radio people don't like that sort of thing. I think it gives them an inferiority complex. I'd never have gotten it if Kensington—

(*She stops herself.*)

SAM

—If Kensington wasn't my father-in-law. I wouldn't even have the job if Kensington wasn't my father-in-law.

SHIRLEY

I didn't mean that.

SAM

It's true.

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

The radio people put in a clause that if you go into the army the contract is immediately void.

SAM

They don't have to worry about that. I'm married. (*SHIRLEY looks up at him but doesn't say anything*) Got a pen? (*SHIRLEY gives him a pen and he signs*) I hear there's something in the new Guild show I might be right for.

SHIRLEY

Yes, you might.

SAM

Why didn't you tell me?

SHIRLEY

I guess I just hadn't thought about it.

SAM

God, Shirley, don't *you* be like that. Send me over for it!

SHIRLEY

(*Very quietly*)

All right, Sam. I will. Don't worry.

SAM

(*Shakes his head*)

I'm sorry.

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

That's all right. I understand.

SAM

I know you do. How's—is it Constance?

SHIRLEY

The cat? She's fine. Thriving. Mother's not well, though. She broke her hip.

SAM

That's tough.

SHIRLEY

I don't know when she'll ever get out of bed. Bones don't knit very quickly at her age. And she's taking it badly. Can't eat like she should. (*Sighs*) It's a terrible thought, but I keep thinking: one good thing, this'll maybe be the last cat I'll have to put up with. I'll call the Guild.

SAM

(*Looks at his hands*)

I'm pasty. I'd better get some health before I go over.

SHIRLEY

It's November. Everybody's pasty.

SAM

(*Rises and starts to leave*)

I'll check with you if you can't get me at home.

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

Sam.

SAM

(*Stops, turns back to her*)

Yes?

SHIRLEY

(*Rises and comes around to front of desk. Hesitant*)

Look, Sam, I'm part agent—and part old friend. You've been talking to the agent. Can the old friend say something? (SAM nods) I've seen you when times were tough, but I've never seen you like this.

SAM

Shirley, don't—

SHIRLEY

You're miserable. And I know why. You're a good human being, but you've stepped out of character. When you married Sharon you became the worst thing a person can be. A self-deceiver.

SAM

Self-deceiver? That's the *last* thing I am! Grow up, Shirley. It's a whole world full of people who'd give anything to sell their souls to the devil! The only problem is the devil doesn't want them!

SHIRLEY

That's just smart alecky.





## C A R E E R

SAM

That's the God's truth. The only difference between me and most of the rest of the world is that I got lucky. The devil made me an offer!

SHIRLEY

Has it made you happy?

SAM

(*Snorts derisively*)

Happy? What kind of word is *that*? You sound like a Continental Foods radio script!

SHIRLEY

It's the word I meant.

SAM

(*Tightly*)

Maybe it will.

SHIRLEY

It won't; you won't even be a good opportunist. The good ones come by it naturally.

SAM

Wait and see.

SHIRLEY

I'm afraid for you, Sam. Because you're your own victim.  
(*Sighs*) Well, the old friend has vanished.

(*She returns to her chair behind desk and remains standing.*)

C A R E E R

SAM

The old friend is wrong. I'll be a good opportunist.

SHIRLEY

Never.

SAM

(*Angry*)

Well, at least the agent never had it so good!

SHIRLEY

That wasn't necessary.

SAM

(*Shaking his head*)

I'm sorry.

SHIRLEY

Don't be sorry for me, Sam.

(*He looks at her for a moment and then turns and exits. The lights fade and come up on another room in SHARON's apartment—SAM's bedroom. SAM enters, takes off his coat and puts it on the back of a chair. He takes something from a desk drawer, plugs it in, and the glow of a sun lamp floods the room. He sits in front of it, carefully changing positions.*)

SHARON

(*Off*)

Sam?

C A R E E R

SAM

(*Calling*)

Sharon? What are you doing here?

SHARON

(*Off*)

I just got in. (*She enters the lighted area. She is dressed for travel. She is very calm and polite to SAM, as he is to her*) Hello.

SAM

(*Not turning to look at her*)

Well, how are you?

SHARON

Fine.

SAM

How was Hollywood?

SHARON

Okay.

SAM

Get a sun tan?

SHARON

Sort of.

SAM

I'll try and catch up.

C A R E E R

SHARON

(Crosses behind him)

They have a studio audience for the radio show?

SAM

I may have to go over to the Guild to see about a play, and I've been looking sort of pasty so— Be with you in a moment.

SHARON

You look fine. I mean, the back of you.

SAM

One minute.

SHARON

(Plunging in)

Sam, I have something I want to tell you. I didn't want to write. I wanted to tell you in person.

SAM

Well—what is it?

SHARON

I want a divorce. (*sam doesn't say anything*) Didn't you hear me? I said I want a divorce.

SAM

Yes, I heard you. You want a divorce. I don't understand why.

SHARON

I'm in love.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Are you sober?

SHARON

Yes— Sam, I'm in love.

SAM

Being married never seems to have interfered with that before. Why the sudden decision?

SHARON

(*With a final effort*)

Sam, I'm pregnant.

SAM

Maury?

(*He turns off the sun lamp.*)

SHARON

Of course it's Maury! My God, what a lousy inference!

SAM

(*Exploding*)

Let's not have any high moral tone about the paternity of the child!

SHARON

Sam, you're mad because your ego's been hurt.

SAM

My ego! Don't give me that crap! (*Goes to blinds and opens them. Turns and looks at SHARON for a long moment. Then he*

## C A R E E R

*speaks)* Your marrying him now isn't going to keep him out of the army, even if you are pregnant.

SHARON

Don't be a bast—(*Stops herself*) Don't talk that way.

SAM

What's the matter? Don't you like the word "bastard" any more?

SHARON

Sam, I'm in love. For the first time in my life, and maybe the only time. Maybe it's the baby. Maybe I've finally got proof I'm a woman, and to be in love isn't something I don't deserve.

SAM

Straight from the psychiatrist's mouth!

SHARON

Damn it, it's true!

SAM

It's always been Maury, hasn't it?

SHARON

Yes, yes, it's always been Maury, and now *he* wants *me*.

SAM

Wake up, Sharon. You know Maury. You know what moves him around. It's not you he wants. It's—"his child." The most important A-number-one piece of pottery in his whole life! He wants it, and he wants it so bad he's willing to buy the oven!

C A R E E R

SHARON

My God, you're crude!

SAM

It's the truth. And you know it.

SHARON

I don't care why he wants me. He wants me, and that's all that counts!

SAM

This time it's different!

SHARON

Yes! Yes, it *is* different! There's a whole new ingredient. And it's not sex and it's not convenience and it's not compromise. It's love. I used to think there wasn't such a thing. But now I know I just forgot it. Like a hope you've given up on until you feel it again. You can understand hope, can't you?

SAM

(*Sits again*)

Yes, I can understand hope.

SHARON

(*Moves to him, throws her arms around him*)

Oh, thank you, Sam. I knew you'd understand.

SAM

No divorce.

C A R E E R

SHARON

Oh, Sam, don't say that!

SAM

(*Rises*)

No divorce.

SHARON

Sam, look, I want to work this out. I want to make you understand. I know what you must feel, but—

SAM

(*Turning away*)

No divorce.

(SAM is silent. He keeps his back to her but he is aware that she is close by.)

SHARON

Anything, Sam. Anything I've got to give. Just name it. It's yours. There's no ceiling, Sam.

SAM

No divorce.

SHARON

(*Hesitates, then sinks into a chair, crying*)

This is my last chance. Sam, I beg you. Please. Let me out.

MAURY

(*Entering*)

Don't beg him, Sharon. You can't get a favor by begging. (To SAM) You want something in return, don't you? It's nothing

## CAREER

Sharon can give. You know Sharon can divorce you eventually, even if you won't go along with it.

SAM

Time is of the essence. The two of you made it that way.

MAURY

What is it? Money? (SAM is silent) Hollywood? You want me to open doors? (SAM is silent) Okay, you can play the part in the show— Come on, Sharon, let's get out of here. (*Helps her up. She goes out and MAURY turns back*) That is the price, isn't it? (SAM nods slowly) You learned, didn't you?

SAM

I had a good teacher. (MAURY turns to go) Let me—(MAURY stops) Whether you believe it or not, best wishes.

(MAURY exits. The lights fade and come up again on a section of the stage that is empty except for two or three folding chairs, which are placed side by side to suggest a couch. Off stage, a voice can be heard saying, "Ten o'clock tomorrow morning, everybody." The owner of the voice walks into the lighted area. He is JACK GOLDMAN, the assistant stage manager. He is carrying a script, a small table and a rehearsal work light. He puts them down, moves one chair to the left of the table and places the work light in the center of the area. KENSINGTON enters.)

KENSINGTON

Say there, uh—

C A R E E R

GOLDMAN

Goldman. Jack Goldman.

KENSINGTON

Oh, yes, of course—(*Anxiously*) Just between you and me, Goldman, how do you think it's coming?

GOLDMAN

Golly, assistant stage manager's a busy job, Mr. Kensington. I been running for coffee so much I haven't really had a good look at any of it.

KENSINGTON

I know, but—what do you think?

GOLDMAN

Gee, I can't tell, Mr. Kensington. Seems fine for the second week of rehearsal.

KENSINGTON

I know, but—what do you think?

GOLDMAN

I think it's going to be all right. (*KENSINGTON crosses to him, shakes his hand*) Coming around tomorrow?

KENSINGTON

If I feel up to it.

GOLDMAN

Good night, Mr. Kensington.

C A R E E R

KENSINGTON

Good night—

GOLDMAN

Goldman, Jack Goldman.

(KENSINGTON *waves good night and GOLDMAN exits. MAURY enters, carrying script and pen. He stops at the sight of KENSINGTON.*)

MAURY

You still here?

KENSINGTON

Maury, tell me honestly, how do you think it's coming?

MAURY

(*Sits on table, checks notes in script*)

It's the second week of rehearsal.

KENSINGTON

(*Shaking his head*)

Hamstrung. Raise the money and pray. That's the story of my life.

MAURY

Relax. Go next door to O'Brien's and get yourself a blast.

KENSINGTON

Join me?

MAURY

Got a couple of chores first. Won't take long.

C A R E E R

KENSINGTON

I'll wait for you in the alleyway. This place smells like a theatre.

(*He exits. SAM enters, carrying his jacket and a script.*)

SAM

Tomorrow should get the third act about blocked out, don't you think?

(*He puts his jacket and the script on a chair.*)

MAURY

Yeah, tomorrow should do it.

SAM

I like what you're doing with the fight scene at the end of Act One. I've got a couple of ideas I want to work over and show you when we get back to it.

MAURY

Don't bother about it.

SAM

I'm not trying to direct, Maury. Just some things you can say yes or no to.

MAURY

We won't get back to it.

SAM

You're just going to *leave* it that way? (MAURY doesn't answer) I'm not sticking my nose in, but it needs work. A lot of work.

C A R E E R

MAURY

You and I won't get back to it.

SAM

What are you talking about?

MAURY

(*Looks at him for a moment, then finally speaks*)  
I'm replacing you, Sam.

SAM

This is a gag.

MAURY

No gag.

SAM

You can't.

MAURY

Eric Peters is available. I'm bringing him in from California.

SAM

Eric Peters! That movie actor! What the hell kind of idea is that?

MAURY

I'm doing it.

SAM

Maury, look, I can be great in this part! You saw that fight scene.

## C A R E E R

MAURY

I'm bringing Peters in.

SAM

So this is the double cross. Sharon goes to Reno, I hold up my end of the deal and now you back out. Was this the plan all along?

MAURY

No!

SAM

Or did you get the idea this morning when you read *Variety* and found out Eric Peters has just finished a seven-year contract with Warner Brothers, and is itching to get back in front of a live audience again?

MAURY

No! I've been thinking about this all week. The fight scene—

SAM

That fight scene's great!

MAURY

(*Lying*)

I didn't believe it.

SAM

You didn't believe it! Don't, Maury. Don't give me that! Tell me the truth. Tell me how these Hollywood producers are going to get up off their fat cans and come running to Maury Novak when they hear how he's pulled the coup of the year.

## C A R E E R

When they hear how he's got Eric Peters, the biggest movie name in America, to star in his new play! Well, you son of a bitch, I'm backing out too! I'll fight that divorce till you're both old and gray!

(*He starts to storm out, but MAURY stops him.*)

MAURY

Good! I'm glad! Fight it! I'll help you! Here! (*Takes a check from his pocket and slaps it down on the table*) Two thousand bucks. That's a starter. Whatever else you need, I'm good for it.

SAM

That fixes everything, doesn't it? That preserves your precious integrity.

MAURY

And I hope this is the biggest hit in history. You're on a run-of-the-play contract. You can collect forever. Full salary.

(*He rises, gives SAM a check.*)

SAM

Conscience money, Maury? To make you forget you're a rat?

MAURY

I don't have to take this from you.

(*He starts to push past him, but SAM blocks the way.*)

SAM

You're slipping, Maury. You can't look me in the eye when you put the knife in. You "didn't believe" the fight scene! You crummy liar!

C A R E E R

MAURY

I'm the boss!

SAM

(*Looks at him for a moment. He slowly tears the check into little pieces and throws them in MAURY's face. Bitterly*)

I'll kill you. So help me God, I'll kill you. You won't know where or when or how, but it's going to happen. As sure as we're standing here, I'm going to kill you. (*KENSINGTON enters*) The time is going to come when you hope it'll be over so the fear will be over. I'm going to kill you. I swear it! You hear me?

(*He grabs MAURY and throws him back on the table.*)

KENSINGTON

Sam!! What the hell's the matter with you? You gone crazy?

SAM

(*Releases MAURY. Calmly*)

Don't you recognize the first-act curtain speech from your own play?

KENSINGTON

(*Thinks a second*)

That is the first-act curtain, isn't it? (*MAURY flips open his script and points to the speech. KENSINGTON is relieved*) Well, you had me going! (*Laughs*) How about me being taken in like that! (*Slaps SAM on the back*) A whole audience bites like I did, and we've got a grand slam! (*Laughs again*) Well, I feel better about the whole operation. But you started the adrenalin going! How about that drink?

MAURY

I'll join you over there.

C A R E E R

KENSINGTON

(*Turns to SAM*)

Sam?

S A M

No, thanks.

KENSINGTON

(*Laughs*)

I should have put some of my own money in this one! (*Starts out*) Hurry it up. The management's buying!

(*He exits. MAURY and SAM are left alone. Neither one says anything for a moment.*)

S A M

*He believed it, Maury. (MAURY turns and starts out) Maury!*  
*(MAURY turns back) I hope the picture you get out of this will be just great!*

M A U R Y

(*Hesitates a moment*)

Yeah, so do I.

(*He turns and exits. SAM is left alone. He stands tensely looking after MAURY and then picks up his jacket, puts it on, picks up the script, starts to go, stops and puts the script on the table. A voice is heard off stage calling, "Everybody out?" The stage lights go down and the rehearsal work light goes on. SAM looks at it for a moment, then begins to cry.*)

*Curtain*



## ACT THREE



## ACT THREE

*It is New Year's Eve, 1945, shortly before midnight.*

*The lights come up on a section of the stage, showing a ship's rail.*

*SAM stands looking out over the water. He is in army uniform, a sergeant's stripes on his sleeves. His hair is graying. A young SOLDIER with a few drinks in him passes by SAM. He stops.*

**SOLDIER**

Hey, Pop!

**SAM**

(Turns)

Oh, hello.

**SOLDIER**

Don't jump!

**SAM**

(Laughs)

No such luck.

**SOLDIER**

(Takes a bottle from his blouse)

How about a pull on this?

## C A R E E R

SAM

No thanks.

SOLDIER

Come on, it's New Year's Eve. Be midnight in a couple of minutes.

SAM

Sure—thanks.

(*He takes short drink.*)

SOLDIER

Boy, this is the best New Year's I ever had. After three years in that friggin' Europe.

SAM

Yeah, let's hope nineteen forty-six is a good one.

SOLDIER

Can't help but be better than the last three. (*Drinks*) You'd think, though, that the goddamn army'd let us off tonight 'stead of waitin' till tomorrow. We sit here and eat our hearts out lookin' at the Statue of Liberty when we could be in Times Square gettin' a free feel in the crowd. Another drink?

SAM

I'm fine.

SOLDIER

Jeez, I never thought it would happen. I never thought I'd

## C A R E E R

really get back. And then the goddamn army makes us sit here and wait.

S A M

Twelve hours won't make much difference.

S O L D I E R

It does to me. They took almost four years of my time already.

S A M

You're lucky.

S O L D I E R

I don't mean I got a job to get back to or anything. I just mean I got time to catch up. I never even *had* a job before the friggin' army. Imagine that! And I'm twenty-three years old. What I mean is, it's different for a guy like you. You were set up before the war even started. You got something to go back to.

S A M

Yes, I suppose you could say that.

S O L D I E R

You got a wife?

S A M

No.

S O L D I E R

No? How old are you, Pop?

C A R E E R

SAM

(*Hesitates*)

I'm thirty-seven.

SOLDIER

You're thirty-seven and you never had a wife?

SAM

I didn't say that.

SOLDIER

Oh. (*Laughs. Takes a drink*) You goin' back to your old job?

SAM

Yes.

SOLDIER

What did you do?

SAM

(*Hesitates*)

I was—I'm an actor.

SOLDIER

My God, you're an actor?

SAM

Yep.

SOLDIER

(*Looking at him closely*)

What pictures were you in?

C A R E E R

S A M

I was never in any movies.

S O L D I E R

I thought you said you were an actor.

S A M

I was on the stage. In plays.

S O L D I E R

Oh, yeah, I know what you mean. I was in one once. In junior high. I was damned good, too. Everybody said so.

S A M

That's right.

S O L D I E R

I never seen any, though, so I guess I never seen you. You ever on the radio?

S A M

Yes.

S O L D I E R

No kidding! On what? I used to listen to the radio all the time.

S A M

I was on a program called *Mr. American*.

C A R E E R

S O L D I E R

I think I heard of it. When was it on?

S A M

On Sunday nights at ten-thirty.

S O L D I E R

(*Shakes his head*)

I used to listen to *Crime Squad* then. You ever on that?

S A M

No.

S O L D I E R

You should have got on that. That was good! Maybe I heard your voice, though, when I was dialing past that station. Say something.

S A M

What do you mean?

S O L D I E R

Say something and maybe I'll remember your voice.

S A M

You've been listening to me for the past five minutes.

S O L D I E R

No, I mean something like you would on the radio.

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Thinks a moment*)

"And now—back to our story."

SOLDIER

(*Shakes his head*)

I never heard you. I'll listen, though, when I get a chance.  
You goin' back to that line? You gonna be an actor again?

SAM

Yes.

SOLDIER

I got a few things to do before I think about gettin' a job. But then I'd like to do something I liked. You know. Like bein' an actor. I may even do that. I was damned good accordin' to what everybody said. Yeah, I'd like that. Maybe that's what I'll do. (*The ship's whistle blasts*) Hey, it's twelve o'clock! It's New Year's! Nineteen forty-six! (*Laughs*) We been talkin' for two years just now! (SAM laughs) Happy New Year, Pop!

SAM

Happy New Year.

(*The lights fade and come up again on SHIRLEY DRAKE's office. It is the year 1950. SHIRLEY is speaking into the intercom.*)

SHIRLEY

Did you try Hurley's? Chero's? Well, call the Silver Spoon. A lot of radio people hang out there. And if you still can't find

## CAREER

him, call his answering service and impress upon them that it's urgent. He's been doing the show ever since he got out of the army. This has got to come from me! (*Snaps off intercom. Sits thoughtfully for a moment. Lights a cigarette and thinks. The intercom buzzes. She snaps it on*) Yes? Oh, good. Good— (*She snaps off the intercom and looks toward the door. SAM enters. He is well dressed and has the look of prosperity about him. He is now forty-one years old. He carries a copy of Variety. SHIRLEY comes around the desk to meet him*) Don't you ever check with your answering service, for heaven's sake?

SAM

(*Smiles*)

I just got your message.

SHIRLEY

Well, *where* have you been?

SAM

I've been having a fight.

SHIRLEY

With whom?

SAM

The world. You. The Continental Foods Company. Everybody. I ended up battling with Sam Lawson.

SHIRLEY

What are you talking about?

## C A R E E R

### S A M

*Variety.* (*Opens the paper*) They pushed my buzzer. (*Reads*) "When *Mr. American*, Continental Foods radio click, switches to TV next month, it will occupy a new time slot. Tuesday night, 10:30 Eastern Standard Time will be viewing scheduled. Sponsor should be pleased with gilt-edged scheduling from network." (*Looks up at SHIRLEY. Crosses around desk, sits on desk chair*) Ten-thirty Tuesday night! And they never said a word to me about it! What if I should get a play? There'd be a Tuesday night performance and I couldn't do it! (*Laughs*) I spent an hour walking through Central Park figuring how to take the Continental Foods Company apart, label by label. I knew what they'd say: They gave me the part back when I got out of the army. The radio money is okay. The television money is good. Very good. I had all their arguments. But Tuesday night!

### SHIRLEY

Sam—

### S A M

(*Laughs*)

Then suddenly I stopped and looked at the same facts all over again. You know something? They didn't have to give me the part when I got out of the army! And the television money is good. Better than I'd ever get in a play. So what if the show is Tuesday night? Maybe it's about time in my life I made a healthy compromise. Don't you think I'm right, Shirley?

### SHIRLEY

(*Hedging*)

Yes, yes, I think you're thinking was correct. Yes, I do.

## C A R E E R

S A M

(*Laughs*)

And you know what I was thinking about? A car. The luxury of the world in New York City, but I keep thinking with this salary I can save up enough to buy a car. Drive to Jones Beach in the summer. Get stalled in traffic jams on the parkways. Just what everybody else does. Maybe I'll even get married again. Don't know who'd have an old duffer like me, but who knows?

S H I R L E Y

Sam—

S A M

You know me, Shirley, so you knew I'd flip. But you can relax now. I've unflipped. (*Laughs*) I'm even going to get you to Jones Beach!

S H I R L E Y

(*Bursting out*)

Sam, stop this!

S A M

(*Hesitates*)

You don't honestly think I'm wrong, do you? (SHIRLEY is silent) Okay, maybe words like compromise are wrong. Maybe it has an overtone of defeat. But I don't mean it like that, I mean—

C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

There's no need to compromise!

SAM

But a Tuesday night performance—

SHIRLEY

They don't want you Tuesday night or any night!

SAM

(*Stopped*)

What? What do you mean? Why not?

(SHIRLEY looks at him, then walks to the door and out of the lighted area.)

SHIRLEY

(*Off. To her secretary*)

Marie dear, why don't you go get yourself a cup of coffee? I'll answer the phone. (*We hear the door to the outer office being shut and SHIRLEY walks back into the lighted area*) Sam, I want to ask you something and you don't have to answer it if you don't want to.

SAM

What kind of mystery is this?

SHIRLEY

And I swear to you it will never go any farther than this room. You have my word.

## C A R E E R

S A M

Will you tell me? The suspense is killing.

S H I R L E Y

Sam—were you ever a Communist?

S A M

Well, that is the nuttiest thing I ever heard! Of course I was never a Communist! My God!

S H I R L E Y

Weren't you connected with a group in the Village called the Actors' Rostrum? Down in Greenwich Village in the thirties?

S A M

Sure. In thirty-three. But it didn't have anything to do with Communists! It lasted four and a half weeks. Including rehearsal. Shirley, I never even knew a Communist!

S H I R L E Y

(*Hesitates*)

You knew Maurice Novak.

S A M

Sure but—(*Stops*) Maury Novak? A Communist?

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

A congressional committee last week accused him of having been a Communist from sometime in nineteen thirty-two to late nineteen thirty-four.

SAM

Well—what did he say?

SHIRLEY

He refused to answer.

SAM

(*Shakes his head*)

Well, that doesn't have anything to do with *me!*

SHIRLEY

They've dug up everything he was ever connected with. His studio has canceled his picture contract.

SAM

But I never joined anything— Nobody can say I did.

SHIRLEY

You were with the Actors' Rostrum. The agency and the sponsor found that out— They don't want to take any chances.

SAM

(*Rises*)

They don't want to take any chances! You mean, for that, for something I never did, I can't work?

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

I know, I know—

S A M

Because they're afraid to get within eight miles of somebody they think might, by the longest shot in the world, have been associated with somebody who *might* have been a "subversive element?"

SHIRLEY

Sam—

S A M

Shirley, I was a master sergeant in a combat infantry division for three and a half years! I've got holes you can see in my stomach to this very day! I've got an arm I can't raise above my head! That's how much of a subversive *I* am!

SHIRLEY

Sam, that doesn't matter. This is nineteen fifty.

(*She is about to cry.*)

S A M

I'm sorry—I'm sorry. It's not your fault.

SHIRLEY

(*Sits on chair*)

I hated to tell you this. I really hated to.

## CAREER

SAM

(*Thinks*)

How much longer has the present contract got to run?

SHIRLEY

I was looking at it. (*Opens desk drawer and takes out contract*) Three more weeks on this thirteen-week cycle.

SAM

It's going to be tough finishing it out.

SHIRLEY

You won't have to. They're paying you off. There's a check in the mail.

SAM

(*Thinks for a moment*)

Is everybody scared? Or just the Continental Foods Company?

SHIRLEY

They aren't scared in the theatre. Yet. But there's nothing casting right now. I'll do my best, though, Sam, I promise.

SAM

(*Almost to himself*)

What am I going to do?

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

Maybe you could get some other kind of job for a while. Maybe even some other—profession. It may take some time before all this blows over.

SAM

Some other profession! Shirley I'm forty-one years old! I can't start in a new profession.

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry, Sam. I'll look for plays. Don't worry. Something will turn up.

SAM

Thanks, Shirley. (*Stands thoughtfully for a moment*) Well, anyway, I've got three weeks' pay coming. (*Looks at her for a moment, then kisses her on the cheek*) I'm sorry I took this all out on you, you know that.

SHIRLEY

I know.

SAM

How's Florence?

SHIRLEY

My mother?

SAM

(*Laughs*)

I got her name straight *this* time!

C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

(*Hesitates*)

She passed on. Sunday, a week ago.

SAM

(*Struck*)

My God. I'm—I didn't know.

SHIRLEY

There was just a small thing in the papers.

SAM

That's terrible. I feel very bad about that.

SHIRLEY

Oh, you shouldn't. It's the best thing, really. I prayed for it. The hip never healed. (*Almost brightly*) Alice, the current cat, isn't eating. Looks like I'm finally rid of cats, at least. That's one thing.

SAM

(*Laughs*)

The one bright side—I'll—I'll be moving, probably, but I'll let you know the phone number and address.

SHIRLEY

All right. (*sam starts to leave*) Sam. (*SHIRLEY rises. He turns back*) What are you going to do?

## C A R E E R

SAM

There's only one thing for me to do—survive.

(*He exits as the lights fade. The lights come up again on O'Brien's Restaurant. It is now 1956, a few minutes after the opening of the play. SAM is standing as he was at the beginning of Act One. He is wearing his waiter's jacket, and is listening to music being played on the Forty Plus Club program. The music stops and the announcer is heard again.*)

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

For the past fifteen minutes you have been listening to *Memory Melody*, brought to you by the Forty Plus Club. Attention, men over forty—

(SAM turns off the radio. CHARLEY enters.)

CHARLEY

Sam, Sam! She just came in.

SAM

Who?

CHARLEY

Miss O'Brien. Miss O'Brien!

SAM

How—how does she feel?

CHARLEY

(Shrugs)

You know her. She's got a problem and she hasn't solved it.

## CAREER

You know how she is—a worrier. All she ordered was a jelly sandwich and a glass of skimmed milk. (*Lowers his voice*) She asked if you were in yet. I bet she offers it to you, Sam.

SAM

Maybe you're right, Charley.

CHARLEY

'Course I'm right! (*Glances at tray*) Talk to you later. I got a jelly sandwich to deliver.

(*He exits out of lighted area. SAM stands thoughtfully for a moment, then moves away from the table. A man walks into the lighted area. SAM looks up. It is MAURY.*)

MAURY

Hello, Sam.

SAM

Hello, Maury. I heard you were around.

MAURY

Yes, I was looking for you. How've you been?

SAM

Employed, thanks. How's Sharon?

MAURY

Pretty well for a woman with two children and a husband who can't work.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Well, I'll use my influence with the boss, Maury, if you're interested.

MAURY

I wanted to see you.

SAM

(Begins setting places)

Look, there's nothing I'd love more than to kick around old times. But I've got to work. The dinner crowd will be coming in soon.

MAURY

I'm going to have a job for you. If you want it.

SAM

(Looks up at him)

You opening a restaurant?

MAURY

I'm doing a play. A good play, and you're right for it.

SAM

How come? Can't you get a star?

MAURY

I'm not doing it uptown. I'm doing it in the Village. No producer thinks it's commercial enough for Broadway. They're wrong. It's a good play.

## C A R E E R

S A M

So you're doing it off Broadway and you're paying everybody forty dollars a week.

M A U R Y

That's all there is. You know that. If there was any more—

S A M

There'll be more when it's a hit like you hope and somebody brings it uptown. Then there'll be plenty. Enough to pay fifteen hundred a week to some movie actor.

M A U R Y

That wouldn't happen, Sam. I promise you.

S A M

You prom—! Let's not even dignify that with a counterstatement!

M A U R Y

Why cut me up over something that happened sixteen years ago?

S A M

You're doing it in the Village, eh? Anywhere near the historic site of the old Actors' Rostrum?

M A U R Y

Not far. Why?

C A R E E R

SAM

(*Looks at him for a moment*)

Just out of curiosity, tell me something. Was it true?

MAURY

What?

SAM

Were you a Communist?

MAURY

(*Hesitates*)

Yep.

SAM

Why?

MAURY

I never had a political thought in my head.

SAM

Then, why?

MAURY

There's more than one way of being an opportunist.

SAM

Well, that's an answer. I'll have to admit that.

MAURY

It's a good part, Sam. The part I want you for.

## CAREER

SAM

No, Maury. I've *been* had. I'm through!

MAURY

(*Quietly*)

That's hard to believe.

SAM

Well, force yourself. I'm through. I'm through grabbing for bones you can tell from a mile away 've got no meat on them. I was a good actor, Maury. And I gave what I had to give. But I never got anything back. The theatre just took and took and took! Maybe it didn't have anything to give. I don't know. So I'm going to let go. (*MAURY seems about to speak, but SAM continues*) It's the only thing that makes any sense. I've got an opportunity, Maury, for the first time in my life—the first time—to have something steady—comfortable and respectable. I've got a chance to be headwaiter here. Funny? Not to me. I'll be good at it. Damn good. And what's more important, it'll give me something in return. For the first time in my life *I'll* get something back (*Extends his hand to MAURY*) Good-bye, Maury, and good luck.

MAURY

(*Hesitates*)

A star part.

SAM

(*Takes MAURY's hand and shakes it*)

I hope it's a big hit, and you bring it uptown to the house

## C A R E E R

next door. It'll be great for our supper business and boost my tips. I couldn't wish you anything but good luck. Now, if you'll excuse me—customers are starting to arrive.

(CHARLEY enters, followed by a middle-aged man and woman, who sit at a table.)

MAURY

If you mean what you say, then you're not the actor I want.

SAM

I mean it, Maury. I never meant anything more.

(MAURY looks at him for a moment, then turns and exits. SAM watches him go, then picks up a menu and slams it down on the table. CHARLEY walks to SAM.)

CHARLEY

I saw you were involved with that guy so I took care of your party on number eight.

SAM

Oh, thanks, Charley. Thanks.

CHARLEY

They're gonna have the works. Cocktails, dinner—I served the drinks so they wouldn't have to wait. Anything wrong?

SAM

Not a thing in the world— They order dinner?

CHARLEY

Not yet, but I think they're ready. Miss O'Brien wants to talk to you soon as you get a chance.

## CAREER

SAM

I'll be glad to talk to her. (*CHARLEY exits. SAM takes out his checks and starts to the table*) Yes, sir, may I take your order?

MAN

Have you decided on anything, Barb? (*At the name, SAM looks up at the woman*) Waiter, what would you—

(*He stops when he notices SAM looking at his wife. She then becomes aware of silence and looks up, first at her husband, then at SAM.*)

SAM

Hello, Barbara.

BARBARA

Sam!

MAN

You two know each other?

BARBARA

Matt. This is—Sam Lawson.

MATT

Oh.

BARBARA

Sam, this is my—my husband, Matt Hemsley.

MATT

(*Pleasantly*)

Well, how do you. (*Doesn't quite know whether or not to*

## CAREER

*shake hands. Rises. SAM extends his hand. Laughs) This certainly is the small-world department! (BARBARA and SAM laugh in agreement) Won't you sit down?*

SAM

(*Hesitates*)

I don't think I'd better. Rules of the house.

(*MATT sits again.*)

BARBARA

You recognized me! Isn't that something, after all these years!

SAM

No trouble at all.

BARBARA

Your hair is a little different.

SAM

Different color.

BARBARA

But outside of that you look about the same.

SAM

It's nice to see you. What are you doing in town? Seeing shows?

MATT

Just tonight. (*Proudly*) Our boy's coming back from Europe tomorrow. We're here to meet him. Been in Germany in the Air Force for a year and a half.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Isn't that wonderful. You must be very proud.

BARBARA

We are.

(*There is a pause.*)

MATT

Well, how are things in the show game? You're still in the show game, aren't you?

SAM

(*Quickly*)

Oh, yes. That is—(*Laughs*) Well, I'm kind of "at liberty" at the moment. Barbara knows what that means. Between engagements.

BARBARA

Yes. (*Pause*) We were so sorry we didn't get to see you when you played Detroit that time. We wanted to so much.

SAM

I understand. That was sixteen years ago.

BARBARA

Really?

SAM

At least.

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

(Shakes her head)

Tsk, tsk, tsk . . .

(Pause. Finally unable to bear it, MATT turns to BARBARA.)

MATT

Well, we'd better get a move on, Barb. (Glances at his watch. Puts money on table) If we want to make dinner and get to the show on time—

BARBARA

Yes, maybe we'd better.

MATT

(Rises from his chair)

Darned fine drinks—

SAM

Yes, they are. He's a good bartender.

MATT

(Extends his hand)

It's been nice meeting you after all these years. (They shake hands) Maybe we'll see you again sometime. (To BARBARA) I'll get our coats. (Glances at SAM, then at BARBARA) Meet you at the door.

(He exits. SAM and BARBARA are uncomfortably silent. Finally SAM picks up the money and takes some change from his pocket.)

## C A R E E R

SAM

You've got change coming.

BARBARA

We probably won't see each other again sometime, you know.

SAM

I know. But I'm glad this once happened.

BARBARA

Yes, so am I.

SAM

He's a nice fellow.

BARBARA

He's a wonderful man.

SAM

I'm very glad, Barbara.

BARBARA

We've been very happy. I've got everything I ever wanted. A home. A husband. Children. I've been lucky. The things I wanted the world smiles on. Maybe because it's the—"way to be." Some other things people want the world isn't so helpful—I've thought about you so many times these past years, Sam. I wanted to talk to you. To apologize.

SAM

There's no need for that. We were both pretty young.

## C A R E E R

BARBARA

I wanted to apologize for not understanding. I do now. You've been what you had to be. Every time I see a painting or read a book or watch a movie that makes me laugh—or cry—I think, why, this is what Sam's stood for his whole life long. (*She turns away from him*) Oh, Sam, I'm so proud of you.

SAM

Thank you, Barbara.

BARBARA

Now I understand, and it all seems so obvious. Maybe that's what understanding is—discovering the obvious. (*Looks toward the front door*) Oh, poor Matt. He's standing there holding those heavy coats.

(*She extends her hand to SAM.*)

SAM

Barbara—

BARBARA

Yes? (*SAM extends the money to her*) Thank you. Good-bye, Sam—And good luck.

SAM

Thank you, Barbara.

(*She turns and exits out of the lighted area. SAM watches her go, then thoughtfully returns to the table. He begins picking up the empty cocktail glasses. CHARLEY enters.*)

C A R E E R

CHARLEY

I thought they were going to have dinner.

SAM

No.

CHARLEY

They said they were.

SAM

They changed their minds.

CHARLEY

Well, "Boss," you gonna talk to her now?

SAM

Who?

CHARLEY

Miss O'Brien.

SAM

(*Hesitates*)

I—I won't be able to take it, Charley.

CHARLEY

Won't be able to? Why not.

SAM

There's a play. A good part.

## CAREER

CHARLEY

(*Disappointed*)

Aww, Sam, for God's sake! I thought you saw the point I was tryin' to get across—

SAM

(*Smiling*)

I did, Charley. I saw it perfectly.

CHARLEY

Then be good to yourself. Accept what you are and quit hurtin' yourself.

SAM

That's what I'm going to do. Accept what I am. (*Starts to take off his waiter's coat*) Let's face it, Charley, I'm an actor.

(*The lights fade and come up again on the wings of a stage. A performance of a play is about to begin. From the wings of the stage we can see the dimly lit off-stage area and part of a stage set. We will see the lighting change with the preparation for the curtain's rise. A one-step platform leads to the stage. JACK GOLDMAN enters from the set, walks onto the platform and steps into our playing area.*)

GOLDMAN

(*Calling*)

Five minutes, please!

(*He exits from the lighted area toward what we imagine*

## CAREER

*are dressing rooms. There is a moment's pause and MAURY enters from the stage set. He walks onto the platform, steps down, stops, and lights a cigarette. We hear KENSINGTON's voice.)*

KENSINGTON

(*Off*)

Maury.

(*MAURY looks up as KENSINGTON enters the lighted area.*)

MAURY

What's the matter?

KENSINGTON

Did he see it?

MAURY

Who?

KENSINGTON

Sam. Did he see the marquee?

MAURY

I don't know. I haven't seen him. He's in his dressing room.

KENSINGTON

Damn electricians charged me overtime to do it tonight, but I wanted it up so when he came into the theatre he could look up and see his name right up there above the title of the play. Starred! I thought it would be a thrill for him.

## C A R E E R

MAURY

He deserves it.

KENSINGTON

Certainly he does! I didn't mean that. He gives a great performance. (*Laughs*) Too bad that's all you can say. They use up all the adjectives, so that when a performance *is* great, that's all you can say: it's great. But it's good for publicity, too. The advance sale jumped today and the brokers are all over me.

MAURY

Don't worry, you'll make a lot of money, Bob.

KENSINGTON

(*Puts his hand on MAURY's shoulder*)

Maury, don't think I'm not grateful to you. I know that when it made such a smash downtown, every producer in New York wanted to bring it up for a run. I know that. And I'm grateful you gave it to me. I really am.

MAURY

(*Smiles*)

Nepotism.

(SHIRLEY DRAKE *enters.*)

KENSINGTON

Lawson see the marquee?

SHIRLEY

I haven't seen him yet, Bob.

C A R E E R

GOLDMAN

(Enters)

Places, please.

(*He steps up on the platform and onto the stage and exits.*)

MAURY

Sharon's finishing dinner next door in O'Brien's. I told her I'd come and get her. Going to watch the show, Shirley?

SHIRLEY

Yes. I have to talk to Sam after.

MAURY

See you later, then. (*He starts to exit as SAM enters from his dressing room*) Looks like we're liable to get a season out of this.

SAM

Looks like it.

MAURY

Maybe we can all have a drink later.

SAM

Sorry. Just don't feel up to it.

MAURY

(*Hesitates*)

See you.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Yeah. See you.

(MAURY turns as SHARON enters.)

MAURY

Oh. I was coming over to get you.

SHARON

I wanted to give Sam my congratulations.

MAURY

(Frowns, glances at watch)

I was planning to get you. I thought we might have time for one before the curtain.

SHARON

(Hesitantly)

Well, do you think we should? (MAURY looks at her for a moment and then laughs and shakes his head with heavy sarcasm, as though this has happened before. She speaks again, quickly) I just meant we shouldn't miss the first scene.

MAURY

(Angry)

We know how the goddamn thing starts, don't we?

(SAM laughs a little to relieve the tension.)

SHARON

All right, honey, all right. Whatever you--

## CAREER

(She reaches out to put her hand on his arm. MAURY brushes her hand away and exits. SHARON takes SAM's hand.)

SAM

Thank you. (SHARON exits. SAM turns to SHIRLEY) Hello, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Hello.

GOLDMAN

(Pokes his head in)

All set, Mr. Lawson?

SAM

All set.

GOLDMAN

We'll go up as soon as we get word from the front of the house.

SAM

Right.

(GOLDMAN exits.)

SHIRLEY

(Indicating a sheaf of papers)

Kensington agreed to a run of the play contract on our terms.

## C A R E E R

SAM

Good.

SHIRLEY

And Paramount called, but it was a seven-year deal. Yearly options. Good enough money. It starts at a thousand a week and goes to thirty-five hundred at the end of the seven years. But I think we're better off waiting for one specific picture and bargaining after that. We'll be in a much better position to demand money. (*sam looks out over the stage*) I'm not making you nervous or anything, am I?

SAM

(*Turns back*)

Of course not.

SHIRLEY

No second night letdown?

SAM

Second night! Second night uptown. I've got sixty-eight Greenwich Village performances under my belt. I'll remember all my verses.

SHIRLEY

(*Glancing at her notes*)

Oh, yes, NBC called. A television exclusive. Something about a spectacular to start with.

## C A R E E R

SAM

I'm not subversive any more?

SHIRLEY

I have a feeling a particular sponsor wants you, so that could all be straightened out.

SAM

Spring cleaning.

SHIRLEY

That's about all. So I won't bother to stay till after the performance.

SAM

(*Quickly*)

Why don't you? I wasn't going to do anything. Maybe we could just go around to the delly and get a sandwich or something and some coffee. I'm not doing anything.

SHIRLEY

Some other time.

SAM

Oh, sure.

SHIRLEY

(*Hesitant*)

Why don't you take Maury up on that drink. They asked you.

## C A R E E R

SAM

(*Shrugs*)

Just don't feel like it.

SHIRLEY

If you're going to be alone—

SAM

Stop, Shirley!

(*He hugs her.*)

SHIRLEY

I really had better go home—I've got to feed Prudence.

SAM

Prudence?

SHIRLEY

The cat.

SAM

I thought you finally got rid of cats.

SHIRLEY

I did for a while after Mother died. Then one day I bought one of my own. (*Sighs*) I guess I just got so used to cats after all those years. And it's better than nothing, I'll say that.

SAM

She like you any better than the others?

## C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

*Hates me! The worst yet! (SAM laughs) They're cute, the way they play, though. They're so serious, you know.*

SAM

Yeah.

SHIRLEY

You ought to get one, Sam. (*Quickly*) Well, it's something alive around.

SAM

That's true.

(*There is a pause. SAM looks out onto the stage.*)

SHIRLEY

Well, that's about it. (*Pause*) Did you—did you see the marquee?

SAM

(*Stands silently for a moment before answering*)

Yes. I did. (*SHIRLEY looks at him for a moment, then begins to cry. She sits on a chair*) Shirley! Shirley! What's the matter?

SHIRLEY

It's terrible! All this—just for that.

SAM

Please, don't cry.

(*He kneels down at her side.*)

C A R E E R

SHIRLEY

I can't help it. It seems like such a waste. (*SAM doesn't answer. She dries her eyes*) Twenty-five years, for a name up over a title.

SAM

Worse things have happened.

SHIRLEY

Have they? Twenty-five years and what have you got?

GOLDMAN

(*Off*)

Warning, curtain! !

SHIRLEY

No home. No family. Twenty-five years that averaged twenty dollars a week. Not life. Just existence. (*Shakes her head*) And all for a name on a marquee. (*SAM is silent. She looks up at him*) Honestly, Sam. Tell me honestly. It doesn't matter now. It's all over and gone. But tell me honestly, was it worth it?

(*SAM stands silently.*)

GOLDMAN

(*Off*)

Curtain!

(*SAM looks up and onto the stage. We see the stage light up as the curtain rises and the spots are turned on full.*)

SHIRLEY

Was it, Sam? Was it worth it?

C A R E E R

S A M

Yes. Yes, it was worth it.

(*He turns and walks onto the stage and out of our sight. We hear thunderous applause for him. SHIRLEY stands, looking out at him.*)

*Curtain*









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